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## COUNT CAGLIOSTRO



*By the Same Author*

WEEP FOR LYCIDAS

SPRING IN TARTARUS

ALL THE TREES WERE GREEN

TRANSIT OF VENUS

DAWN EXPRESS

VERNAL EQUINOX

UNDER THIRTY (*Edited by Michael Harrison*)

WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR . . . ?

GAMBLER'S GLORY

BATTERED CARAVANSERAI





*[Rischitz Studios]*

COUNT DI CAGLIOSTRO

# COUNT CAGLIOSTRO

*'Nature's Unfortunate Child . . .'*

*by*

MICHAEL HARRISON



LONDON  
RICH & COWAN  
37 BEDFORD SQUARE, W.C.1

To  
PHILIP BODLEY SCOTT  
IN ALL AFFECTION

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## NOTE BY THE AUTHOR

**I**T may be noticed that, although I have rendered all foreign titles of nobility and distinction into their English equivalents, I have made an exception with regard to the title, 'Marquise'. This I have done intentionally. There is, to my mind, an elegance in the word, 'Marquise', which is not to be found in the greatly less euphonious 'Marchioness'; a word that I find irresistibly evocative of a grotesque literary character, or (and this is hardly more pleasing) of dog-collared peeresses culled from the musical-comedy stage of a forgotten day. So, because it seemed to me likely that many of my readers might be similarly affected by the sound and sight of the English 'Marchioness', I have retained, against my own rule of transliterating all foreign words save only proper names, the French form of this title of nobility.

M. H.



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## I

WHEN Pietro Balsamo died, he left his widow in indigence. He had been in his life a tradesman in a humble way, doing the small business among his neighbours in a back street of Palermo, gaining custom, in the way of most petty Italian shopkeepers, by the judicious employment of that accommodation called the *libretto*. As tokens of his husbandly regard he had left behind him only children, that the widow was at her wits' end to support. Fortunately, though, Pietro had two brothers, both of whom had succeeded in the world; enough, at any rate, to enable them to give the widow some support. Matteo, the elder of the two, was the chief clerk in the Post Office at Palermo, while Antonio, the younger, occupied an indifferently paid but eminently safe position in the offices of a local firm of shipping agents. Willingly the two brothers contributed towards the dead man's widow's support; partly by reason of their natural generosity, partly because of the deeply religious principles with which each was imbued.

The widow's eldest son, Giuseppe, had already, even at this early age, evinced a notorious disinclination to follow in the godly footsteps of his parents and his uncles. Giuseppe was, in brief, a bad lot. His friends were to be found among the most unruly elements that the back streets of Palermo could show, and the name of Balsamo was one not unknown to the police officers.

On the death of Pietro Balsamo, the brothers Matteo and Antonio decided that they ought, in justice to their avuncular obligations, to undertake the reformation of their errant nephew. It is understandable that the plan of education first to be considered by these two upright men should have been founded on a religious basis, and accordingly it was to the seminary of San Rocco that the young Giuseppe was sent in order there to receive the elements of a liberal education. Unfortunately, while the monks might have been able to impart learning, they failed singularly in instilling the rudiments of discipline into their young charge, and after having demonstrated, beyond all argument, the impossibility of reforming the troublesome youth, the masters declared themselves unwilling to continue longer in the attempting so patently impossible a task. The young Giuseppe was sent home.

Matteo and Antonio decided then that a monastic life would be best fitted for one so refractory. Giuseppe, obedient as yet to parental decree, went willingly enough to the monastery of Cartegirone, belonging to the order of the Benfratelli. These holy men enjoyed the reputation of owning a rugged Christianity, which enabled their arm to be as strong as their tongues were persuasive. The two brothers Balsamo felt that if any one could cure their nephew of original sin it was the Benfratelli.

At thirteen, then, Giuseppe Balsamo was admitted a novice into the brotherhood, whose main duty was the tending of the sick. He was placed in charge of the monastery's Apothecary, and it is interesting here to note that it was generally supposed, when the facts of his colourful career came to be known,

that it was in the laboratory of the Brother-Apothecary that Giuseppe first became acquainted with those principles of chemistry which were afterwards to exercise so great an influence on his life. We may reasonably conclude that the hours spent in the Dispensary were hours, not of tedium, but of intense interest for the boy; we know certainly that no other part of the monastic life pleased him in the least degree. From San Rocco he had run away, not once but many times, only to be dragged back and whipped; and he seems to have learnt by experience that escape from an unpleasant situation was the more readily to be had by cunning. He knew that running away would inevitably produce no other result than a forcible recapture. His mind, therefore, busied itself with more subtle means of encompassing his freedom.

At Cartegirone, as in most other monastic establishments, it was the custom to relieve the tedium of meal-times by having some member of the brotherhood read aloud; the choice of literature being, naturally enough, confined to works of a religious and improving nature. This task was no sinecure; the brother whose duty it was to read aloud missed the leisurely eating of his food, and had perforce to bolt the half-cold meal in the few minutes respite allowed him at the dinner's end. The business of reading was therefore considered something of a punishment, and inevitably those to whom the task was given were all who had failed to stand highest in the Prior's esteem. It is a matter of historical fact that to Giuseppe Balsamo this tiring duty was most frequently allowed.

It will be easy to understand that the resentment that the young novice felt at his being charged with so distasteful an activity should arouse in his fertile

imagination dreams of revenge. More, they aroused prospects of escape, and it was through this same reading that his freeing himself from the rigours of the monastic discipline was finally accomplished.

Let us picture to ourselves the great refectory hall of the Monastery, with its tall lancet windows shining the more brightly for the darkness of its hammer-beamed roof. At one end of the room, under a brightly coloured painting of the Holy Family, a table stands on a high dais, and at this table the Prior sits with the more important members of the staff. Beneath the Prior's watchful regard the brothers eat at long trestle tables, which are laden with a sufficiency of well-cooked meats; for the rules of the Order concern themselves with other denials than are comprised in bodily hunger. In a far corner of the room the young novice stands with his book. Grace has been said, and the preliminary clatter of scraping benches and rattling cutlery having died down, the Prior gives a sign to Balsamo to commence his reading. The book in the young man's hand is the *Lives of the Saints*. There is no indication on that smooth face, olive coloured from the suns of Palermo and the residuary tincture of a reputed Moorish descent, that the Monastery's bad boy intends this day to force the Prior to grant what nothing but necessity had made him concede. Calmly the young man takes hold of the purple ribbon which marks the place in the book where yesterday's reading finished, and begins to read aloud in his clear, youthful tones. The Fathers at San Rocco had reason to complain only of their pupil's congenital rebelliousness. They had had no fault to find with the quickness of that same pupil's mind. Thus Giuseppe's reading was marked

by speed and clarity, and what he had to say was to be heard even in the farthest corners of Cartegirone's great refectory.

We make use of the phrase: 'I could not believe my ears'; it is a phrase too often used, and too often used without thought. But on this day the monks of Cartegirone might well have been excused for disclaiming all credence in what their aural faculties told them was being said. For, having selected as the subject of that day's reading the life of one of the holiest of Mother Church's children, the young Balsamo proceeded to paraphrase the inspiring narrative of the good man's life. In his customary quiet tones, his face smooth with a deceptive innocence, Balsamo told the monks of the scandalous actions of the Saint. He described how, far from being worthy of admission to the hierarchy of angels, the man had been none other than a tippler, a roysterer, and a frequenter of the stews. To the fact that the good brothers paid, of ordinary, but an open attention to these improving readings, may be attributed the ease with which scapegrace novice was allowed to progress so far in his shameful paraphrase. For he was permitted to describe not only the youthful follies of the Saint, but to embark in detail on a description of that Saint's steady progression in the course of wickedness. Where the Holy Book mentioned the visits of the Saint to churches and monasteries, Balsamo substituted for the names of these places those of the bawdy houses and thieves' kitchens of Palermo; and for the names of those holy men and women with whom the Saint had passed hours of the purest friendship, the boy substituted those of the town's worst cut-purses and prostitutes. There is no knowing how long this

impudent jest had been permitted to continue, had not Balsamo, with that grim humour, or 'deep world irony', that Carlyle saw as the sign of a character naturally great, declared that among the associates of the Saint in his chambering expeditions were none other than the Prior and the Brother-Apothecary. The mention of his name called the Prior's belated attention to the nature of this blasphemous narrative, and Giuseppe Balsamo found himself a free man; free to go back to Uncle Matteo and Uncle Antonio, and to the corner boys of the Palermo slums.

## §

While this act of defiance was not the first of Balsamo's rejections of Authority's claims, there can be no doubt that the very boldness of its conception, together with the positive certainty of its efficacy, confirmed him in his anti-social ambitions. Not until long afterwards can we find the signs of any desire on the part of Balsamo to associate himself with that orderly safeguarding of privilege to which we give the name Society. Those acts immediately following his triumph over the brothers of Cartegirone (although the importance of the victory lay in the fact that the system had been bested that Cartegirone represented) testify to the fact that he had been confirmed in a desire to conduct his life upon those principles to which those who find profitable the safeguarding of our present social order have applied the name 'criminal'.

Consider his next escapade in rebellion. The details vary in certain small particulars, but all accounts are in agreement concerning the main features of the story.

To digress for a moment: what makes for the biographer the importance of this early part of Balsamo's life is the undeniable fact that to the uses of his criminal activities he brought all the knowledge that he had gained honestly. There is a certain type of rebel who despises, or who affects to despise, in his revolutionary activities, all such advantages as have been secured to him by even a forced adherence to the orderly ways of established rule. Balsamo was not one of these; from his childhood he had displayed the possession of a sound common-sense, and it is interesting to note that when, after having left the monastery, he enrolled himself among that Order (no less ancient) which is known in Italy as the Knights of Industry, he should have selected, as clients of his unlawful activities, none other than those monks whose company he had latterly left.

It was the custom among the Knights of Industry—and may well be so even at this day—to insist that the aspirant after admission to their organisation should distinguish himself in some way, and by giving proof of his aptitude in the criminal arts, demonstrate the advisability of his becoming a member. This proof was readily forthcoming, as Balsamo shewed his ability to forge tickets of admission to the local theatre. These tickets were executed by Balsamo with a skill which defied detection, and his customers he found, as I have said, among the brothers of the Monastery of Cartegirone.

If his companions among the Knights of Industry were impressed by his skill, the monks, are we to believe the story told of them, were no less admiring of his ability. I have already pointed out that Balsamo invariably made use of all knowledge honestly come



by, and among such pieces of knowledge was an understanding of the elementary principles of draughtsmanship. This knowledge he had acquired in the Academy of a local drawing-master, where he had been sent by his kindly and long-suffering uncles, after his expulsion from Cartegirone had shown them the impossibility of expecting that their nephew should continue in a monastic career. Already he was known as a veritable young scoundrel, the friend of every petty criminal who lurked around the street corners and in back alleys, to snatch a purse or cut a throat for half-a-scudo. When, long afterwards, as he lay in the prison of San Leo, that Inquisition which had condemned him came to write his story, it was in these words that the biographer summed up the reputation enjoyed by young Balsamo among the people of Palermo. (We may discount a certain intensity of expression as being due to the understandable dislike of the historian for one whom the Church had condemned as a heretic, but while no doubt exaggerated, the account must be admitted as substantially truthful.) He says: "There was no fight or street scuffle in which he was not involved; no theft of which he was not suspected. The band of young ruffians to which he belonged frequently came into conflict with the night-watch, whose prisoners, if any, they would endeavour to set free. Even the murder of a Canon was attributed to him by the gossip of the town." The important thing, of course, is not that he should have murdered the cleric, but that his reputation for lawlessness had already become so widespread that the attribution to him of such a crime was possible.

All the same, his mother and his uncles seem not to have despaired of affecting some miraculous

redemption of his character. Family trust lives long, especially in those households which have always exhibited a strong family-sense, nor must we overlook, in our estimation of the story, the undoubted effect on such patient men as Matteo and Antonio Balsamo of the innocent character of their nephew's face. There is in existence a picture of Balsamo, dating from a much later period of his existence; indeed, from after the time when he had become the Count di Cagliostro. It is the picture of a man already advanced into the middle years, and the hair is thin and the chin is double. But observe the smooth roundness of that face; the full yet delicately moulded lips; the fine nose with its well-arched nostrils, and the large, limpid, open eyes! True, there is a look on that face of cynical amusement; the longer one studies the picture, the more (despite the fact that it is not smiling) it seems, that face, to deepen into amusement. But there is nothing in that mirth more dangerous than the laughter of the naughty child; and this, after half a lifetime spent in the pursuit of ambitions to which almost any other phrase than 'innocent fun' may be, with justice, applied. If, after such half-a-lifetime, that round face could preserve unmarked the smooth curves of laughing childhood, how much more deceptive, cries the historian, must have been that face of him who turned his bland regard up to the pained looks of his uncles! In our modern phrase, Balsamo had been gifted, by the providence which seems to look equally after the thief as after the thief-taker, with that sort of face which can 'get away with anything'. And that this is no fanciful theory of mine, may be deduced from the fact that it was rarely indeed in all the fifty odd years of his

life, that Balsamo did not get away with it. Indeed, it may truthfully be claimed, that there have been few men in this world who have got away with anything quite so successfully as did Giuseppe Balsamo, Count di Cagliostro and Grand Copt of Egyptian Masonry.

But to return to Balsamo's drawing lessons. He made, under the guidance of his master, encouraging progress in the pictorial art. Reports of his industry and aptitude gladdened the tender hearts of his uncles, and now, to the prayers for assistance offered up by his saintly mother, were added prayers of gratitude for the change which had been manifested in the young Giuseppe. It may not be doubted that with that belief in God's providence which had never been shaken in the Balsamo family, the two uncles and the mother permitted themselves to indulge warm visions of a Giuseppe entering that noble company of artists who have made the name of Italy for ever famous. But Giuseppe had no wish to become a Domenichino or a Botticelli or a Leonardo da Vinci; a practical boy (as he turned out afterwards to be so eminently practical a man), he disdained the long years of preparation which must inevitably elapse between apprenticeship and achievement. If he was prepared to take small profits, it was because he most urgently desired the quick returns. Thus, he set about recompensing himself for the tedium of those hours already devoted to mastering the pencil and brush.

His opportunity to recompense himself came quickly enough. It is said that he first demonstrated his ability to apply his draughtsman's art to illegal purpose by robbing his uncle. If we may believe the

accounts of Balsamo's early life, this uncle was the first victim of the nephew's skill as forger; but the boy's ability to counterfeit the writing of others was not long permitted to rust for lack of employment. His sister having conceived a passion for a cousin, and the parents of both boy and girl having offered an objection to the friendship, Giuseppe offered his services to his sister as intermediary. This position enabled him to forge letters from the girl to her lover, and from the lover to the maiden; neither knowing that the letters received were supposed to have been written in answer to others. By this means, Balsamo, who invariably made a pointed demand in the forged letters for some little present, was permitted to collect for his own use the gifts that the lovers sent to each other. However, like the forging of the theatre tickets, this counterfeiting of love-letters proved small gain, bringing the forger a profit only to be reckoned in pence. Emboldened by the success of these petty crimes, and thoroughly confident in his ability to embark on more ambitious projects, Balsamo, through the channels of information known to all members of the Swell Mob, sought a patron of his illegal skill. This man, or so the story goes, was the principal of a large religious institution, who deemed himself to have been defrauded of a legacy. This legacy had been promised to him by a person of deep religious conviction, but on the death of that person, it was discovered that his good intentions could not be carried out, by reason of an entail which existed on the property. Accordingly, the legacy which had been intended for the monastery went instead to a certain Marquess Maurigi. It was in order to prepare documents reversing this occurrence

that the services of Balsamo were called upon; the Superior, no doubt, quietening his conscience with the reflection that the money, however improperly diverted to God's use, would be employed in far holier works than that of supporting the worldly indulgences of the Marquess. We may be sure that Balsamo was concerned only with receiving his fee. The forgery was successful; indeed, so perfectly executed, that the fraud passed undetected for more than seven years, when the disappearance of Balsamo rendered futile all efforts on the part of the police-officers to apprehend him.

We now come to the first truly important piece of villainy; I shall draw later the reader's attention to what seem to me the significant features of the story. In the meanwhile let me tell the story without comment.

### §

There was living in Palermo at that time, a goldsmith named Marano. The institution of banking, as our modern world knows it, was already, even at that early date, well established; but it seems probable that the title, 'goldsmith', as applied to Signor Marano, indicated the fact that he was what we should call a banker.

Marano, in common with many other Palermans, had heard of the curious divinatorial gifts exhibited by the young Balsamo. Lest it should seem to strain the credulity of the reader that I ask him or her to believe that Marano, the well-known goldsmith-banker, should have heard of Giuseppe Balsamo the young apache, I would like to draw attention to the fact that Uncle Matteo Balsamo was the chief-clerk

in the Palermo post-office, a man whose responsible position would naturally bring him into contact with all such citizens as carried on commercial operations necessitating the use of the postal system. Uncle Antonio, while occupying a position of less responsibility, was yet employed in the offices of the well-known shipping firm of J. F. Aubert & Co., whose services Marano, in shipping valuable cargoes, would be most likely to use. It is therefore highly probable that Marano was acquainted with Uncle Matteo at least; and from the postal clerk it is not unlikely that he heard the tales of nephew Giuseppe's extraordinary gift of clairvoyance. The details concerning this are regrettably rare, but when we remember the power of the Church in the Italy of 1760, and remember too, that the last witch to be executed in Europe was drowned at Glarus in Switzerland, as late as 1782; while lesser penalties continued to be imposed for the crime of 'witchcraft' to a far later date; we may understand the reluctance of a family to incur for itself a suspicion of heretical conduct; a reluctance which is surely the cause of the meagreness of such details as we possess concerning Giuseppe's psychic powers. However, it seems to have been fairly well established that the young Balsamo was in possession of some curious power which enabled him not so much to see what was about to happen (otherwise he had surely been saved much misfortune later) as to see what was happening at distances beyond the normal range of vision and hearing. I shall go later into my reasons for believing Balsamo to have been in the genuine possession of an undoubted gift of clairvoyance; at the moment let it suffice that his reputed possession of this gift had come to Marano's

ears, and that, knowing it, Giuseppe marked the goldsmith down as his victim.

Marano, according to the accounts transmitted to us, seemed to have been an example of that curious duality which is not infrequently encountered in a certain type of business man, who unite with a business shrewdness an astonishing folly in all other affairs not directly connected with their own business. Thus, Marano, for all that he was an eminently successful goldsmith-banker, was reputed to be, in the words of Carlyle, a 'ninny'. Outside of his counting-house Marano would seem to have fallen the prey to his own cupidity, and a man who could shrewdly sum up his clients in the office, fell for the wiles of the youthful Giuseppe. The story, as have all stories of the artful dodgers, has an amazingly familiar ring. I remember once myself being in conversation with a certain member of the London Criminal Investigation Department, and I asked him why the stories employed by confidence tricksters for the purpose of extracting money from the gullible were always conforming to an anciently established pattern. Why, I asked the detective, does the man called Patsy invariably employ a dropped rosary as the means by which he falls into conversation with his intended victim? and why are the stories of the Spanish prisoner, and the gold brick, and the perpetual motion machine, and the legacy which must be distributed within one week; why are these stories never replaced by other examples of the criminal's imagination? nor even altered in the least particular from telling to telling? Because, my friend answered, like all good things, they have stood the test of time. They continue to be used because experience has shown their worth. Your criminal,

like every other craftsman, advances by experience, and learns to rely on those means that tradition has demonstrated to be good.

Thus, the story of Marano's duping has, alas! a familiar ring. Substitute 1760 by 1939; Palermo by London; Giuseppe Balsamo by Rupert de Beaufort, and the story might come straight from the back pages of the *News of the World*.

First of all, one may imagine Giuseppe coming humbly into the outer office of Marano's establishment; the diffident demand that the goldsmith grant him an interview; the contemptuous questioning by the clerks met with that sort of apologetic obstinacy which is the secret only of the naturally humble strengthened by the consciousness of honesty. One may imagine Marano, disturbed by the argument outside, leaving his cabinet to poke a head through the door, and demand of his clerks what all the trouble is about? We do not need a great deal of imagination to visualise the eager stepping forward of Balsamo as he sees appear the object of his enquiry. Nor, indeed, may we doubt that the reasons which, the boy hinted, were behind his call were not hinted with sufficient plausibility to secure him an instant, if grudging, interview with the goldsmith.

The object of his visit, Giuseppe explained, was primarily to ask for one thing only: advice. Doubtless Marano's face relaxed into a smiling relief as he was assured that the nephew of the worthy postal-clerk had not approached him in order to beg for money. After that assurance the interview must have progressed more amiably.

He had come, Giuseppe explained with a delightful candour, in order to seek guidance in a problem which



was somewhat unusual even with the grown-ups of Palermo. Doubtless Signor Marano knew of the curious psychic gifts that Balsamo had discovered to lie in his own power? Yes, the goldsmith had heard of them, without, of course, giving them too much credence.

Naturally, Balsamo nodded; it was not to be expected that others should credit him with gifts that he hardly might recognise himself, except as figments of the imagination. On the other hand, one could not deny certain proof. There had been a case, possibly not unknown to Signor Marano, in which Balsamo had indicated to his companions the precise location of a girl of their acquaintance, together with an exact description of what that girl was doing, and this when the person in question was removed from them by a considerable distance. Yes, the goldsmith admitted, he had heard of this.

In that case, Giuseppe continued, it might be hoped that the goldsmith would listen to what he was about to say. This newly discovered psychic gift had put Giuseppe in possession of the whereabouts of some buried treasure, which had been deposited years before in a certain grotto not far from the city of Palermo. It could not have been unknown to Balsamo that the rumour of buried treasure was one with which hopeful citizens liked to busy their tongues and imagination, nor was he disappointed in the eagerness with which Marano responded to his suggestion that they seek the treasure together.

Marano, Giuseppe pointed out, was a business man. Marano nodded his smirking acknowledgment of the compliment. Accordingly, Giuseppe continued,

the goldsmith must prefer that the matter be put on a purely businesslike basis.

How much argument was necessary before Balsamo persuaded the other to deliver up a fee of sixty ounces of gold we shall probably never know; all that we do know is this, that the gold was paid over to Balsamo in consideration for his undertaking to lead Marano to the cave where the gold was buried.

Now, were the story to end with the departure of Balsamo with his sixty ounces of gold, it might stand as the account of a fraud; ingenious enough no doubt, but nothing out of the ordinary. The fact that it does not end here, calls attention to that imaginative power, and something which was above pure criminality, which distinguish Balsamo from the ordinary trickster.

For, consider: Balsamo had received his fee; there was no more material profit to be gained from the deceiving Marano. A thief's ordinary prudence would surely have counselled Balsamo to go with his sixty ounces of gold while the going was good. But Balsamo, as will be seen later, was possessed of an orderly mind, whose disciplined working demanded from him a completeness of behaviour. Thus, despite the fact that the whole profit of the transaction was received in that first interview with Marano, Balsamo was impelled, by his own essential orderliness, to see the comedy out to its finish.

Accordingly it was arranged that Marano should accompany Giuseppe to the spot in which reposed the treasure; and a few days afterwards, at midnight, swindler and dupe set out together.

The journey on which they were embarked was no lengthy one; a matter of a few miles only, and

we may please ourselves in reflecting on the imaginativeness that Balsamo showed as he beguiled the hour or two of walking in raising the hopes of the bemused goldsmith.

The cave that Balsamo had selected as the supposed site of the treasure was, naturally enough, situated in a spot sufficiently remote from human habitation. For one thing, the proper conduct of the scheme demanded freedom on the part of the actors from accidental interference; for another, that genius for the theatrical which was to be 'so marked a feature of Balsamo's intellectual make-up, urged him inevitably to select the *mise-en-scène* the most appropriate.

As in Ireland, so in certain parts of Italy, the ancient worship has not been replaced by the newer faith, but merely superseded, with the result that the pagan gods have but been reduced to a subordinate position with regard to the newer pantheon. Paganism and Christianity go hand in hand, and the prayers are still offered to the Magna Mater in her old as well as in her newer guise. Thus, it will not be improper to suppose that the invocations with which Balsamo now called on the Prince of Darkness to reveal to the gap-mouthed Marano the precise location of the treasure were couched in a form which had been hallowed by the tradition of two millennia. On the other hand, even if he were not acquainted with the ritual of the secret faith, Balsamo had picked up, doubtless, some of the less familiar antiphons with which the monks of San Rocco and Cartegirone celebrated the virtues of their innumerable saints. But whatever were the words of invocation; whether traditional prayers, Christian or Pagan; or merely the gibberish suggested to his fluent

tongue by his nimble mind; be sure that the effect was proper to its purpose, and that Marano was put into that frame of mind in which the non-appearance of the Father of Lies would have seemed almost an insult to the young wizard.

By the light of resinous boughs flaming smokily in their upheld hands, the two men gazed at the stony ground; dry and cracked after the long rainless months of summer. At their feet the earth was scratched with the mark of the pentagon, or five-pointed star; a symbol which has been used from time immemorial among the Mediterranean peoples as a talisman of great power. Breathlessly Marano waited for the manifestation that now he was no longer doubtful would be. His mind, deceived by its own avarice, had rejected all those doubts that the more prosaic atmosphere of the counting house had permitted him to entertain. Here, in this rugged glen, under a pall of darkness rendered the blacker by the light of the spluttering flambeaux, his imagination found such activities as he was now embarked upon the most reasonable in the world.

He waited an apparition; nor was he to be disappointed. There was a noise; such a noise as a fall of stones might make, tumbling down an escarpment into the bed of a dried-up watercourse; there was a rustling as of leafless bushes being brushed aside; and, following that, the harsh susurrus of feet being dragged over baked mud. Only a second elapsed between noise and movement. Suddenly there was a yell which must have frozen the marrow in the goldsmith's bones; a dreadful ululation more terrible than that which Dante tells us rises from the tortured throats of the damned; for it was heard by a man,

rather than dreamed. Only the maniac cupidity of Marano saved him from headlong flight. There were cries and howlings and a noise like the gnashing of demon fangs. His eyes were blinded with a blue light, and his nose smarted with sulphurous fumes. Then forms leapt into the orbit of his vision; forms of darkness upon whose horned skulls twinkled witch-lights of red and blue. Satan and his imps had arrived; the reader must imagine for himself or herself what were Marano's feelings at this moment. Whatever they were; whether regret or satisfaction were uppermost; it cannot be doubted that his faith in Balsamo's ability to bridge that dark gulf which stretches between the world of light and the world of shadows, received, in that moment, the strongest assurance. I am certain that the knowledge of that fact was received by Balsamo as precious a guerdon as the more material benefit of the gold. I shall call later the attention of the reader to other examples of this need of Balsamo's to tickle his own vanity as well as to fill his pocket; the needs were equally strong, and one was never allowed, throughout his whole life, to take precedence of the other; nor was one allowed to go hungry that the other might be nourished. It is, of course, a well-known fact in criminology that vanity is a failing of the criminal mind, whether we look for it in the cut-purse or the politician, but this vanity of Cagliostro's was suffered to exist and to develop independently of his criminal actions. I shall consider later certain episodes of his career in which his activities were directed solely towards self-aggrandizement, without, so far as can be seen, any idea entering into his mind of a profit to be gained other than that same self-aggrandizement.

But to return to Marano. His ears deafened by the shrieks of the demons; his eyes blinded by the blue-bolts of their lightning flashes; his nostrils aching from the tartarean vapours in which they danced; Marano's mind struggled to retain its hold on the essential fact of achievement. Balsamo had not deceived him; the impossible was true; the Prince of Darkness himself had risen from the charnel caverns of his shadowy kingdom in order to stock the strong-rooms of Marano's bank, and permit the grasping banker to put out unlimited loans at usury.

Then the demons retired into the darkness beyond the wavering penumbra of the torchlight, and a voice, stern with the accents of command, bade Marano seize the spade with which he had come armed, and dig the ground where he stood. The astonished goldsmith did as he was commanded; the steel struck elfin coruscations from the stony ground; and as though the light were a signal to his baleful company, the black forms rushed swiftly out of the circumambient darkness. There was a tittering cry of 'I can't control them!' as Marano's head shuddered to a buffet which laid him flat upon the ground. With eldritch screams, the beings (demons—what else could they be?) belaboured the unhappy seeker after treasure, until, mercifully—unconsciousness supervening—all knowledge of his persecutors left poor Marano's mind.

It is perhaps unnecessary to add that the demon forms were nothing more supernatural than a quartet of goatherds whom Balsamo had hired to help him carry out his jape. Hung with cypress rags; their homely features besmeared with burnt cork, and their conical hats adorned with farthing dips soaked in

copper salts and strontium; the honest hinds had willingly joined in the fun. As the five perpetrators of the outrage crept away, leaving their victim moaning in the darkness, they must have regretted that there had not been a bigger audience to applaud the triumph of their histrionic skill.

Marano, of course, was not so stupid that a recovery of consciousness did not bring also a recovery of common-sense. He well understood (for daylight has a curiously reassuring effect) that he had been made the subject of a singularly impudent fraud. His resentment overcame the counsels of prudence, and the first impulse of Marano's, on returning to town, was to denounce Balsamo to the magistrates. As it happened, the *podestà* was not yet up when Marano, hobbling on a stick wrenched from a wayside olive tree, came through the gates of the city, and this accident was to determine the future course of Balsamo's life. For, sitting in a *trattoria*, pending the hour at which the *podestà* might receive him, Marano changed his mind concerning the advisability of subjecting himself to the ridicule of all Palermo. Instead, he decided on the truly Italian course of taking a personal revenge, and decided to have Balsamo murdered at the first opportunity which presented itself. That this threat was uttered in the presence of one who bore towards Balsamo feelings of friendship may well explain Giuseppe's sudden resolution to leave the city in which he had been born. With that resolution the true history of the Count di Cagliostro properly begins.

## II

THE historian, in seeking to estimate the true character of his subject, may not achieve that estimate without a proper understanding of the circumstances in which that subject had his being; for all men, save idiots, are influenced by the events of the world in which they move. A man's 'background', however, may be divided into three parts: the background that is congenital—that is to say, that purely domestic set of circumstances into which he is born; that background which he acquires—namely the circle of friends and acquaintances to which his own personal predilections incline him; and thirdly, the world-movement which carries all men along with it, whether they be the humblest of artisans or the most potent of princes.

Before we go on further to consider the facts of Balsamo's career, let us refer the man himself to the three several parts of his background.

First of all, his family. I have already mentioned that his father was a respectable tradesman of Palermo, who died in Giuseppe's childhood; leaving the boy in the care only of his mother. The effects of a maternal upbringing are as yet insufficiently established that I should adduce them here in order to estimate their value in the formation of Cagliostro's character. On the other hand, it will not be doubted that the absence of a father (always, in the Italian family, the chief of the household) cannot but have permitted to the



young Giuseppe the fullest enjoyment of that personal liberty so dear to his rebel's soul. I have mentioned his uncles, and the circumstances in which they were employed; two respectable bourgeois who can have had but little sympathy with any but a traditional way of life. So far as Giuseppe was not in sympathy with their orderly outlook, their acceptance of established rule must, inevitably, have had the power to develop the boy's obstinate rejection of their point of view. Rebels are made not so much by a congenital disinclination to accept the pretensions of established authority, as by each rebel's failing to find sympathy with those parents, guardians or advisers who do accept that authority. It may well be that the rebelliousness of Giuseppe Balsamo was less congenital than induced by the dreary lawfulness of those of his family with whom the earlier part of his life had perforce to be spent.

However, this is but purest speculation. The historian must confine himself, where possible, to the limitations of fact. Balsamo, then, was born into the most respectable of families; not unacquainted, one must suppose, with a certain degree, say never of affluence, but of comfort. That was his personal background; a household of traditional form, in which the simple comforts of existence were rarely threatened by economic stringency (seeing that Uncle Matteo and Uncle Antonio had such a strong family sense), and in which God's gifts were rendered due acknowledgment by Donna Rachele, Giuseppe's mother.

So much for his family; you must consider now the acquired, as distinct from the inherited, background. We have seen that the friends of Giuseppe

were to be numbered among the most lawless elements of Palermo; but does our saying that Giuseppe elected to enroll himself among the gangs that infested his city's backstreets truly sum up the development of his youthful character? This writer, for one, doubts the accuracy of that summing-up. It seems to him that the criminality of Giuseppe's friends was a merely accidental quality; that they became Balsamo's friends, primarily because they offered him escape from the intolerable restrictions of his own family's household, and that if, in order to accept the escape that they offered, he had also to accept the fact of their criminality, why! that was the inevitable price which was demanded of one who would flee the restrictions of ordinary existence.

*It will not be improper to ask that much attention be given to the two facts of Balsamo's apprenticeship to the Brother Apothecary and that to the drawing master. Let us admit that the selection of the two professions that these men represented was accidental; it must be admitted also that in his response to the teaching that was offered, Balsamo showed himself eager to take advantage of spiritual as well as material gain. That this was so is most clearly shown by the fact that Balsamo made use of what he had learnt; the implication being, of course, that no man may learn *quickly* that in which he has no interest. His drawing lessons, although spread over a trivial period, enabled him to undertake the forging of theatre tickets and at least two legal documents; while the hours, and they were few enough, spent in the laboratory at Cartegirone, were utilised, as we have seen, in the provision of the 'props' for the evening performance at the treasure cave. Considering, then, Balsamo's*

acquired background, we may see in it no more than an opportunity to develop his own soul, and to assuage that hunger for sensation which was but the undeveloped manifestation of his hunger for self-sufficiency.

We must now pass to the consideration of the cosmic background; the quality of that world in which Balsamo and all others of his day had their existence.

### §

The historian, ranging through the length and breadth of human chronicle, cannot fail to meet with the paradoxical fact that faith springs from disbelief, and that, as a corollary, an excess of faith produces its own agnosticism. The eighteenth century is generally known to us as the Age of Reason, which means the age in which man attempted to examine those problems whose solution earlier generations had long since determined as incapable of resolving. Faith is that quality of the mind by which we accept as proven what is incapable of proof. In attempting such proof, the eighteenth century naturally rejected the quality of faith.

Yet, just as faith in excess produces agnosticism so, conversely, an amplitude of questioning drives us to the simplicity of the axiomatic. Thus, while the eighteenth century launched itself in the sunburst of emancipation, in whose radiant dawn each man felt himself free of the shackles of outworn belief; already, by the halfway sign of that century, it was observed that the grey clouds of superstition had begun to gather; wispy, immaterial, fragile; but yet unmistakably *there*; about the brows of the Eman-

culated; while, by the end of the century, that old fact of human nature had been rediscovered by bitter experience: that man may never rid himself of faith; all that is permitted to him to do is to change the object of his belief. Thus; as in our own age; allegiance was withdrawn from Christ in order that flowers might be lain at the shrine of Osiris; just as once the smoking incense had been brushed away from the feet of Baal in order that the myrrh should be set burning on the altars of a newer god. One need not be over-cynical to laugh at the spectacle presented by Human Reason in the eighteenth century, which drove out one god in order to admit a myriad others who had not even the justification of traditional acceptance.

And what strange gods they were! Outworn deities disinterred from their tombs in the worm-eaten pages of old books; noseless effigies, abraded by the sea, washed up on the sandy shore of some Mediterranean bay; importations from Mexico or Peru or that Egypt of which the eighteenth century had learnt only at secondhand from Greek historiographers; mildewed omnipotences reconstructed from the faded frescoes of subterranean temples; Mithra slitting the bull's throat with a rusty dagger, his tattered locks crowned with the cap that the French Revolution was to make familiar to all the western world; all these, and a hundred more, earned the tribute of those rationalists whose minds found it unreasonable to bow the knee to the Galilean. Such a world found nothing unreasonable in the stories of a Swedenborg spending the hours of sleep in journeys among the trackless ways of intergalactic space, nor had the companions of such a man greater objection to offer

than that it was 'unfashionable' that the Swede should drop down on his knees at St. Paul's Cross, or raise his hat to the Prophet Isaiah as he met Isaiah by Friday Street in Cheapside. England, notoriously behind the times, sent, it is true, poor Christopher Smart to a madhouse, for that he insisted on praying in the public thoroughfare, but with a nation so utilitarian, the objection of the authorities to Smart's public devotions may have been based on nothing more than a reluctance to admit the right of even the most devout to cause an obstruction. Other nations were more tolerant; every petty principality in the Empire provided sanctuary for all who had preached new gods or renounced the old; even the Jesuits, although preaching an outward allegiance to the Son of God, found lodging with Catherine and Frederick the moment it became known that the Pope had suppressed their Order.

A more curious age has not existed in this world's history. There was an outward insistence on tradition, in so far as tradition remained profitable; otherwise tradition was utterly rejected, mostly by those to whose advantage it was that tradition, all tradition, any tradition, be maintained. The historian marvels at the curious spectacle of priests enjoying their benefices in a style of living calculated only to shock their communicants; of kings patronising the apologists of a liberal social system in which kings had little or no part; he sees, in short, a wilful self-destruction of the age's social system; a self-destruction comparable only with that by which the lemmings, or rats of Norway, hurl themselves in one body into the waters of the North Sea. This vast body of rodents, obeying an impulse as strong as it is unreasonable, stop for

nothing; a man who stands in the way of the stampeding horde is trampled to death; trees are brushed aside, mountains surmounted; the primæval race memory is stronger even than self-preservation. Thus it was with the eighteenth-century; with its rulers rather; in whom had been born the seeds of their own dissolution. But whereas biologists would have it that the rats of Norway follow their headlong course into the waters by reason of the fact that beneath those waters lie salt-licks, that once, in ancient times, the animals migrated to, no such reason may be found for the wilful renunciation of power by which the ruling class of the eighteenth-century surrendered its rights and privileges to those who have now inherited their birthright.

The importance to the historian of such men as Cagliostro—an importance that I shall strive in the ensuing pages to make seem indisputable—is that they were the midwives of the Rebirth. If they were not actually responsible for the coming of the New World, then let there be no doubt concerning the fact that they were the assistants at that New World's birth; so intimately connected with it; so much of the very fabric and essence of the change, and what that change produced, that to know that New World is to think of them, and to examine them is to know all that there is to be known of that New World that they helped into being.

### III

IT was for long supposed that this part of Balsamo's life that I am now about to describe had its existence only in the man's own luxuriant imagination. Recent researches, however, have determined that there may be good reason for assuming that Balsamo did indeed spend the years following his hasty flight from Palermo in the manner presently to be described. It may be, of course, that the names of both persons and places are wrong, although 'fictitious' would be the better word, but I feel sure that the *facts* of the narrative are, in the main, true.

According to the story that Balsamo told thirty-five years later, he made, after having left Palermo, the acquaintance of a man named Althotas; 'the noble Althotas'. Some writers give the place at which Balsamo met Althotas as Medina, while others give it at Messina. It is more likely, seeing that Althotas seems to have had an actual existence, that the place was Medina in Arabia. This Althotas was a man of education, an adept in the Hermetic art, and acquainted in an extraordinary degree with that occult knowledge which is the heritage of the Orient. According to Balsamo's own account,<sup>1</sup> this Althotas was an alchemist, who possessed an extensive library of works dealing with his chosen art, and Balsamo stated that Althotas, owing to the fact that the

<sup>1</sup> This is but *one* of the accounts, as given by Cagliostro to the Inquisition-Biographer. The other account—given at Cagliostro's trial—we shall see later. But the two accounts substantially agree.

alchemist found himself unable to give sufficient time to the prosecution of his studies, enrolled Giuseppe into his service as assistant. One historian claims that no longer a period than a fortnight was necessary for the development of the two men's acquaintanceship into a strong friendship, so that Balsamo was initiated into all the secrets of his master's secret science. It is said that Althotas had discovered, in the course of a career devoted, over many years, to the pursuit of alchemical achievements, certain valuable processes, including a method for improving the manufacture of flax, and a way of imparting to linen a softness and glossiness which made that material the equal of silk. What follows now is, of course, not historical: depending merely on hearsay; but it is worth our notice, seeing that it gives us an indication of the manner in which Balsamo's practicality of mind had rendered itself noticeable to his contemporaries. As I have said in another place, there are two sorts of truth: the one which concerns what might have happened; the other, which concerns what did happen. To whichever group this story belongs, rest assured that it is the truth.

It is said that after having worked for some time in the laboratory of Althotas, Balsamo, perceiving that the expensive materials necessary to the alchemical processes were not readily forthcoming, suggested to his master that the lack might be remedied by their going to Alexandria, there to make money out of the more practical results of Althotas's experiments. The story has it that their stay in Alexandria was one of forty days, after which time, having taken with them a large quantity of the improved flax, Althotas and Balsamo returned to Medina with a



considerable sum of money. How long master and neophyte remained at Medina is not known; it is said that they then visited the other principal cities of Arabia and Egypt, and certain parts of Turkey, where they sold drugs and amulets, by which they gained large sums of money.

Balsamo's description of this period of his life, much exaggerated, when delivered on oath before a Parisian court of justice, inspired in his audience nothing but laughter. The writer, however, finds it not so easy to dismiss as fiction this episode. There must have been a period of his life in which the undeniable psychic gifts of Balsamo were developed. Earlier historians have seen fit to dismiss with none but the most savage comment the pretensions of Balsamo to the possession of that power called clairvoyance. Fortunately we live in an age in which the existence of such a faculty has been established, and those powers which seemed to earlier ages to be supernatural we now concede to be no more than extranormal. There can be no doubt that Balsamo was indeed one of those persons in whom the faculty of clairvoyance was singularly developed.

Our first record of this gift is dated in Giuseppe's extreme youth, a record that we owe to the biographer appointed by the Holy Inquisition. The life of Balsamo, as narrated by this anonymous historian, has been regarded with suspicion by secular historians, but it must not be forgotten that, in spite of the fact that it was written by an ecclesiastic of an heretic, the narrative was based on a confession extracted from its unhappy subject under the pressure of inhuman cruelty. It has been admitted that the trial of Balsamo by the Inquisitors was conducted

in a room, against the wall of which leaned that instrument of torture called the rack, and it may be supposed that those who did not hesitate to threaten hardly hesitated to condemn. Although we have but Balsamo's own word for what happened in his childhood, common-sense would urge us not to repudiate the evidence on those grounds alone.

Here is the story. Balsamo claimed that one day, while he and his friends were idling away the time together, the conversation turned upon a certain girl who was known to all of them. It so happened, as is the way in idle talk, that one of his fellows wondered in what the girl was engaged at that moment. Giuseppe immediately offered to satisfy the boy's curiosity. He marked a square upon the ground, and made some crosses with his hands above the mark. Immediately the figure of the girl was seen in the square, playing with her friends. Balsamo's companions, so affected were they by this vision, went to seek the girl, and found her in the very same attitude as that in which Balsamo's picture had shown her to be.

There are many other stories confirming Balsamo's possession of a gift which, in our day, has come to be accepted, if not as a commonplace, then certainly as something not entitling its possessor to the condemnation which belongs to those who deal in forbidden things. The writer himself has had so great an experience of what a famous American professor<sup>1</sup> has called 'extra-sensory perception' that he finds it impossible to doubt the sincerity of Balsamo when he claimed the ability to perceive happenings beyond the *normal* range permitted to the physical

<sup>1</sup> J. B. Rhine, of Duke University.

senses. After all, it is a fact that the vibration of an object produces waves of sound of which the human ear may detect but a relatively small quantity, nor is it unknown that those vibrations to which we give the name of *light* are but an infinitesimal portion of those etheric movements caused by the electronic motions of matter. A dog's ear is tuned to receive vibrations beyond the normal range of human hearing, and there are insects whose powers of perception may only be explained in their acuity by supposing them to be responsive to etheric vibrations which lie either higher or lower than the red or the violet which severally constitute the boundaries of the light band between whose limits only the human eye transmits the impulses of the light rays to the brain.

The unknown is usually but the unperceived or the forgotten; a searching of the brain will often reveal that which seems to have been forgotten, and a development of the vision may often enable us to detect what before had seemed to have had no existence. The human eye misses little, and the human brain, by its agents of sense, touch, hearing, sight, and taste, receives all into the unfillable store-rooms of the mind. But like the guardians of most warehouses, into which the junk of a lifetime has been thrown, the brain forgets what it has stored away. In order to find that piece of furniture which twenty years before was pushed behind some dusty corner, the searcher needs to ask of the caretaker a key to the warehouse, and beg of him permission to hunt at leisure among a thousand discarded objects of outworn purpose. Thus with the mind. Not a memory, good or bad, but the mind has not given it harbourage; how few memories, good or bad, will

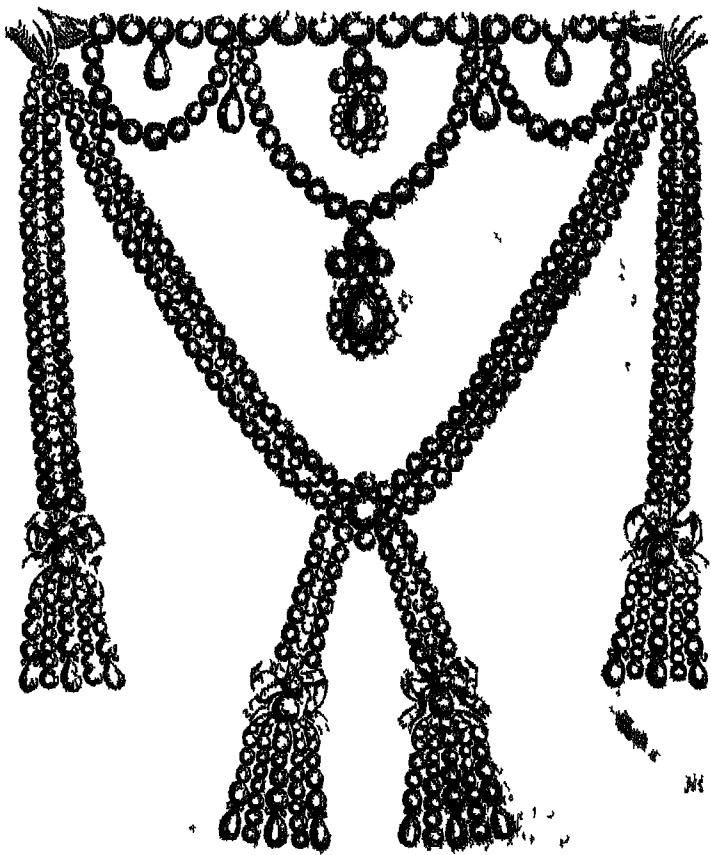
that caretaker of the mind, the brain, produce when called upon to do so! Like the lazy caretaker of the warehouse, the brain will save itself the trouble of searching by saying: 'It's not here'. Only the indefatigable searcher will insist that the object sought is indeed to be found, and will demand the key.

I prefer to think that Althotas was one who was able to demonstrate to Giuseppe, not only that the key existed, but that it lay within the power of the boy (as it lies, indeed, within the power of each one of us) to use that key; to admit himself within the double-locked doors of the mind, and to go seeking whatever he would discover.

For there was a time when we humans knew everything. We knew what was to happen as certainly and as accurately as we know the past, but our own cowardice put up a barrier between the happening and our perceiving it. Because, ahead of us, lay tragedy as well as joy, and because we have been, as we are now, cowards at heart, we preferred to remain ignorant of that future which might bring us equally suffering with happiness. We would rather be deprived—rather blind ourselves to the fact that happiness awaited us on the morrow, than be informed that sorrow might succeed it. But this power of all-knowledge is not atrophied; it is no more lost to us than is the power of sight lost to that man who has purposely put shades upon his eyes. Let him leave them there over a long period, and it will seem to him, on removing them, that his tender retina may never more bear the fierce splendour of the sun. But the blinking, peering vision soon adapts itself to the light and heat of the recovered glory, and so, as we

permit each blinkered sense to share once more in the conduct of our full human activity, we shall find that our physical and mental economy will adapt itself naturally to the wider vision, just as that eye, long blinded, learns to bear, after a while, what seems at first to be the intolerable blaze of sunlight.

May it not be that Althotas—sage, adept, magician: call him what you will—had stumbled upon the fact of human blindness, and in stumbling upon that fact had taught himself the means of opening the eyes of the soul. Seeing that the miracle of sight is daily conferred upon the blindest of us, so that at the touch of the Master's hand those of us who have seen men as trees walking, are restored to the glorious use of full vision, may it not have been that to Balsamo himself that cure was vouchsafed? It does not follow that a man so gifted need necessarily become, by reason of that change, what we call a good citizen. The Roman Catholic Church specifically denies the right of those persons possessed of 'supernatural' gifts to be regarded, *ipso facto*, as Saints. By means of a spiritual hyperaesthesia concerning whose nature we at present may hazard but few opinions, St. Francis of Assisi was enabled so to identify himself with the physical sufferings of his Saviour as to reproduce upon his own body those stigmata with which Our Lord's body was itself marked. Nevertheless, although Francis of Assisi is today honoured as one of the most holy of the Church's servants, there are, and there have been, many persons whose bodies bore similar stigmata to whom the Church has steadfastly refused the title of Saint; indeed, has even denied to the person bearing these marks the status of good citizen. The writer feels himself not



[Rischgala Studios]

MARIE ANTOINETTE'S DIAMOND NECKLACE  
(ONE-THIRD ORIGINAL SIZE)



in error in claiming that such a person lives in Europe at this present time.

I have introduced this subject, not by way of a digression, but in order to meet the objections of those persons who would deny to Balsamo the possession of a clairvoyant gift because of his known criminal activities. I do not deny that Balsamo sought to meet the obligations of society in ways which society itself has claimed to be anti-social. It is not for me to condemn a man who seeks to meet the demands of a self-elected autocracy in ways that that autocracy has forbidden; to the writer it is no more improper to steal money to pay the King's taxes than it is for the King to impose them, but this is the history of a man, and not a political enunciation of the views of another. We will therefore return to Balsamo.

We have, of course, only Balsamo's own word for the accuracy of the history of that time spent with Althotas. This personal narrative may be found in two versions, substantially agreeing, one being in the *Memoir* prepared for his own defence by the Count (when charged with complicity in the affair of the Queen's Necklace) in accordance with the rules governing French legal custom in 1785, which permitted accused persons to make a broadcast statement to the public before the actual hearing of their trial. The other is to be found in the *Life* prepared by the Inquisition-Biographer when the Count lay in the cells of St. Angelo. This writer must resist a fascinating conclusion: that although his account of himself as written in the *Memoir* may be given such value, no more and no less, as the Count himself merited at the time of his success's zenith; to the narrative of the Inquisition-Biographer



must be accorded that respect which is to be earned only by the truth; the inference being, of course, that nothing but the truth may pass the lips of a man being questioned under torture. This is an easy error in which to fall; unfortunately for truthful humanity, lies and pretensions keep their old power even when the man who utters them can barely articulate them for the groaning his punishment inspires. Besides, what is truth? who has ever defined it? who now or at some future time shall ever dare to define it? Pilate asked that question of Truth Itself, and got no answer for his pains. Nor has torture ever vindicated itself as an extractor of truth. Between the hurling forth of that thunderbolt against witchcraft<sup>1</sup> by which Innocent VIII showed his preoccupation with an older world at the very moment when Columbus and his sailors were discovering a newer, until that time when the last witch expired in watery gurglings in a Swiss Canton, more than three hundred thousand convicted witches were put to death, making the appalling average sum of nearly one hundred thousand a century, or ten thousand for every decade, or almost one thousand for every year of the time that flies. And of all these near-half-million of luckless mortals, the majority were condemned out of their own testimony. Read through the old processes: there you will see it, all written down in black-and-white. "I, Joan Fletcher, confess that I did attend the Coven . . . or ride upon 'my broomstick . . . or talk with the cat-ape which was my familiar . . . or give myself in carnality to my Master . . ." Yes, it is all there. Read through the depositions taken during the affair of the Abbey of

<sup>1</sup> The Bull *Summis Desiderantes Affectibus*, issued 1484.

Loudon; you will hardly credit that even torture could have induced human beings to utter such rubbish. Then consider the historical fact that a great deal of this confessed matter was extracted by simple questioning, such as obtains in our legal system at this day. It is sometimes held against the great minds of the past that they were too credible in the matter of popular superstitions; it is recorded against the honour of Sir Thomas Browne, for instance, that the author of *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* himself had not found emancipation from one of the commonest of vulgar errors, that of belief in the existence of witchcraft. But reflect that you, reader, accept the verdicts of our law-courts as reported in the newspapers, and such men as Sir Thomas, in an age as yet unacquainted with the subtler principles of the psychiatric science, were perfectly justified in accepting as a statement of fact what those accused of witchcraft voluntarily confessed.

This brings us back to the consideration of Balsamo's own confessions; one of which was voluntary, the other extracted under torture or the threat of torture. They are both in substance similar; but what shall one deduce from that fact? That the tale told in Balsamo's *Memoir* was a truth that even torture could not force the unhappy recusant to deny? Or that the vanity of the man was so strong that not even torture could make him admit the fictitious nature of his personal history? We shall never, I think, know; but it may be of some value to us, in our attempt to achieve a clearer picture of this enigmatic character, to bear in mind that it was a hunted, despairing man who took that decision to go to Rome which was to be the last uncoerced gesture

of his brilliant career, and the mournful record of those last few months of liberty do not encourage us to believe that it was with much of his old spirit that Balsamo faced the inquisitors of the Holy Office. All this, of course, is to anticipate, but it is necessary to bear these facts in mind when we are assessing the value of Cagliostro's own account of his early life.

And, in that account, how, says he, did he spend the years after having left Palermo, whether it was to nearby Messina or distant Medina that he first went? I have already mentioned his meeting with Althotas, and his apprenticeship to that shadowy figure. There is, of course, nothing in this account of unsuccessful alchemical experiment and more practical discoveries in the preparation of flax for commercial uses, that one need disbelieve.

That Althotas was an alchemist we need not mind, believing; many before him have been, and many after; and now that the experiments of our scientists have vindicated Aquinas's and Aristotle's theories of the basic structure of matter, we know that the alchemist's dream of transmutation of matter (that is, the transmutation of one substance into another substance) was not the chimerical thing that but the generation before last found it. The actual transmutation of matter has, indeed, been accomplished. With regard to Balsamo's story that Althotas, in searching for the *Elixir Vitae*, or the *Grand Alkahest*, or the *Black Stone*, or whatever reward the sage was seeking, discovered a lesser benefit, this may well be: did not Abou Moussah Jafar, hunting the philosopher's stone, first give science its knowledge of corrosive sublimate, the red oxide of mercury, nitric acid, and nitrate of silver, with which last admirable

substance the sight of countless infants has been saved from the maleficent effects of *ophthalmia neonatorum*? Did not Roger Bacon, embarked on the self-same errand, find instead gunpowder, the telescope and the magic-lantern? Nor was Van Helmont's tireless experimentation completely wasted, seeing that, while hunting the Alkahest, he investigated, for the first time, the properties of vaporous substances, which to him owe their name of 'gas'.<sup>1</sup> And, in the same apparently futile pursuit, did not Paracelsus discover that for which the tobacco-infusions of Dr. Jean Nicot had proved unavailing: a cure, in mercury, for the *lues veneris*?

Does it, then, tax so greatly our credulity, when we accept Balsamo's statement that Althotas, in his alchemical laboratory, found a means of imparting to flax the glossiness and softness of silk? This is not all of the story, naturally: there are other things not, at first hearing, so easy to credit. This 'noble Althotas', for instance. Who was he? Was he, indeed the master of Hermetic mysteries, or had that name merely the fascination for Balsamo that it has for me? And did the Sherif of Mecca, to whom Althotas was said to have taken the young Giuseppe, really say to the boy as he left the Sherif's palace, "Adieu, unfortunate child of nature!"? Those who know what afterwards happened to Giuseppe should have some hesitation in denying that these remarkably fitting words were spoken. But did the two, Althotas, and the disciple to whom the Master gave the name of Acharat, truly make the journey to Mecca? Shall we ever know?

<sup>1</sup> Probably suggested to Van Helmont by the Flemish word *geest* spirit. (Chambers's Dicty)

According to Balsamo's own story, Althotas shewed him, by incontrovertible proof, that the boy born to respectable shopkeeper parents in a house near the street called *Il Casaro*, in Palermo, was, in reality, heir-apparent to the princely dignity of fabled Trebizond.

True . . . ? Who can say! But there must be heirs to *some* of all those countless kingdoms and principalities that the past has seen vanish in even greater numbers than has this our own generation. The writer knows of a man, employed in the work of an humble watchman, who discovered, late in life, his title to the broad acres over a trifling portion of which it was his present task to watch. Life resembles nothing so much as a pair of balances: when one side rises, the other is, of necessity, depressed.

And with regard to Balsamo's statement that Althotas was able to dematerialise himself, I would call the attention of the reader to the fact that it was only by such a talent that the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle cared to explain the remarkable escapes of the equally late Mr. Houdini. Balsamo's remark, however, is generally taken to be a facetious mode of explaining that Althotas could usually be relied upon to give the police the slip.

But let us follow Balsamo's career, as described by himself<sup>1</sup>, failing another historian. It appears that, after having stayed forty days in Alexandria trading in their flax-silk, Althotas and Giuseppe (or *Beppo*, as he was nicknamed) visited other cities of the Levant, until the time came when they decided to return to Italy. The Italian has ever been renowned for the nostalgic love that his own land inspires in his

<sup>1</sup>i.e. to the Inquisition-Biographer.

breast, and we shall see that Cagliostro was not different from the majority of his countrymen in this desire (always indulged at considerable danger to himself) to return to the scenes of his younger days. Althotas was a Greek, but he seems to have fallen in readily enough with Balsamo's suggestion that the two make their way to Italy. The affair of Marano was as yet unsettled: the police held a warrant for Balsamo's arrest. Did Balsamo know this? Did Althotas? Were they, as the Inquisition-Biographer hints, bound only by the association of criminals? or did Althotas possess, as Cagliostro claimed, a vast collection of Arabian manuscripts treating of the alchemical science, and was the relationship between the young Italian and the elderly Greek based on something less ignoble than a criminal partnership?

According to Balsamo's own account, the ship in which they set out for Italy was driven by contrary winds into the port of Valletta, and if Balsamo may be believed, Althotas could make some claim to alchemical knowledge, for Balsamo maintained that adept and neophyte were hospitably received by the Grand Master of the Knights of Malta, Pinto, and invited to collaborate with that dignitary in his search for the Philosopher's Stone. This ecclesiastical principality was not different from most of the other states of Europe at that time: outwardly secure in a traditional habit, but the prey to its own self-destructive impulse. Forty years more, and the soldiers of the French Republic would send the monkish lords of the island packing, their power and glory to be remembered only in the drab uniforms of stretcher-bearers at English football matches. But his magical treatises gave the Grand Master no hint of the fate so soon

to overtake his little kingdom, and there was still leisure to spend the hours with the two travellers in his laboratory, endeavouring to change the atomic weight of lead for that of a more precious substance. Months passed pleasantly, if unprofitably, but Balsamo wearied of the alchemical experiments. Leaving Althotas to continue the search for the philosopher's stone, Giuseppe made his way back to Italy, where, in Naples, he seems to have come once more under the notice of the police. At least, that is what the Inquisition-Biographer says, and it may well be true. From Naples he went to Rome, bearing with him—his own statement, this—letters of introduction from Pinto to the Baron de Bretteville, Malta's minister to the Holy See. This statement has been generally dismissed as unworthy of examination: I would not deny it altogether. To me its veracity would seem to depend on the fact that Balsamo really visited the Grand Master: if he truly did, then I think it quite likely that he prevailed on that simpleton to give him the letters; for of all those things that we do know concerning Balsamo, the most proven is his ability to impose on others. Why should the Grand Master have proved an exception to that rule of which there were later to be such splendid examples? At any rate, this was what Balsamo claimed, and he further stated that De Bretteville in turn introduced him to the Cardinals Orsini and York. We may be sure that if such introductions were ever given Balsamo knew how to profit by them. Of course, he had long since dropped the unimposing name of Balsamo, and had experimented with a variety of fanciful pseudonyms, calling himself at different times, the Chevalier di Fischio, the Marquess di Melissa,

the Baron di Belmonte, di Pellegrini, d'Anna, di Fenix (a subtle reference, surely, to his faith in his own indestructibility?), d'Harat, and the Count di Cagliostro. Having tried them all—and others beside, I doubt not—he preferred the last title to all others, and this he finally adopted for the term of his life. When, after having left Naples, he went to Rome with his ‘letters of introduction’, it was as the Count Alessandro di Cagliostro, the name by which he is known to history.



## IV

BEFORE I go on to relate the adventures of the Count in the Eternal City, let us examine this adopted name of his. Of it may be said what Mr. Michael Arlen said of 'Shelmerdene': 'It was not her real name, but it became her far better than any real name could have done'. Surely the splendid vocables of that majestic title may not be grudged to one whose life blazed into a glory too bright to be borne by a mere Giuseppe Balsamo? I shall later examine the question which has been raised since the death of Cagliostro: were Balsamo and Cagliostro one and the same person? Let me say first of all that I, in common with Cagliostro's own contemporaries, believe that they were; but it would be an unpardonable laxity on my part were I to neglect to call the reader's attention to the existence of a doubt concerning this identity, and to the existence of a body of responsible opinion designed to uphold a different view from my own. However, this matter must be examined later; all that is necessary now is to find the reason for Balsamo's having adopted the title of Cagliostro in preference to that of the numerous others that we know him to have borne. Mr. W. R. H. Trowbridge, in his interesting life of Cagliostro, definitely rejects the supposition that Balsamo and Cagliostro were the same people, but I admit that I cannot find in his argument any but the most negative proofs. He argues as argue those persons who claim that Dr. Johnson

spent the year 1745 with the troops of Prince Charlie. They argue that there is a lacuna in the otherwise exhaustively annotated life of Johnson, which lacuna covers the period of the '45 Rebellion. If, they cry, Johnson was not in Scotland, where then was he? Where indeed? But the world was as wide in 1745 as it is in 1941, and there were many other places in which Johnson may as well have been as Scotland. Mr. Trowbridge would seem to base his objection to an acceptance of the identity of Cagliostro with Balsamo merely on the fact that there is not in existence a witnessed deed of poll registering the change of name. Considering the facts both of Balsamo's life and that of Cagliostro—facts which in themselves indicate a marked similarity of character—it would be unreasonable to expect that such adoption of a spurious title would be kept otherwise than as a strict secret. On the other hand, as Mr. Trowbridge himself points out, there was in Balsamo's own family, the name of Cagliostro<sup>1</sup>. To anticipate my examination of this question of the identity of two historical characters, let me call the attention of the reader to the *extraordinary* coincidence—assuming that Cagliostro and Balsamo were two different people—of the fact that in the family of Balsamo there should have existed the name of Cagliostro. That such coincidences do occur I should be the last to deny, but it must be borne in mind that the coincidence becomes the more astonishing when we consider that the name of Cagliostro is by no means a common one in Italy. Mr. Trowbridge commits himself to the statement that “there is, however,

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle says that Balsamo's grand-uncle (a bellfounder at Messina?) was named Giuseppe Cagliostro.

no reason to suppose that Cagliostro was in any way related to, or even aware of, the existence of the aristocratic family of the same name (i.e. Balsamo) who derived their title from the little town of Balsamo near Monza in the Milanese. As a matter of fact the name was a fairly common one in Italy, and the Balsamos were of no consequence whatever". This statement seems to me to err on the side of optimism. Anyone who has examined the advertisement columns of (say) the better-class American magazines, and seen therein the numerous advertisements of genealogical searchers, will know that the desire to trace a long descent is one so widespread as to make the gardener Adam and his wife almost unique examples of self-sufficiency. We know, whether or not Cagliostro be a different person from Balsamo, that Giuseppe adopted numerous titles of nobility; that, in other words, he had the desire to have himself accounted a man born higher in the social scale than was in fact the case; and this being so, is it credible that he had not made himself acquainted with the existence of a noble family whose title was indeed his own family name? I myself find this very hard to believe. Let us leave this matter of identity to a later part of the book: let us see now whence was derived that title by which, to my mind and to the minds of his contemporaries, Balsamo has perpetuated himself.

We have seen that Giuseppe's father was a tradesman in a small way of business; one not successful enough, it appears, to have avoided a registration against him of an act of bankruptcy. His mother, it would seem, was of more account socially, being derived of Sicilian stock, whereas the father was suspected to be of mixed Moorish and Jewish blood,

at a time when persons of Levantine origin were not held among the Italians in the highest regard. The great-grandfather of Giuseppe Balsamo, on his mother's side, was one Matteo Martello, who had two daughters, the youngest of whom, named Vicenza, married a Giuseppe Cagliostro. This Giuseppe lived in Messina, and it is worthy of remark that it was to Messina that the Inquisition-Biographer made Balsamo go after he left Palermo.

At any rate, it was as the Count di Cagliostro that Balsamo entered Rome, bearing with him the letters of introduction from Grand Master Pinto, and thus it is in Rome that properly begins the career of this celebrated character.

According to the Inquisition-Biographer, Giuseppe's morals had suffered no such improvement as had his social standing. He might be now the noble Count Alessandro di Cagliostro, but he behaved just as badly as though he were still Beppo, the little cut-purse of the Palermo backstreets. According to the same biographer, it was but three days after his arrival in Rome that he was sentenced to three days' imprisonment for having quarrelled with one of the waiters at The Sun Inn; one suspects over the matter of the bill. It would be interesting to discover if his introduction to De Bretteville was presented before or after his little trouble with the *sbirri*!

All through the story of Cagliostro we keep encountering his extraordinary practicality. I have pointed out before his ability to make use of all knowledge adventitiously come by: his employment of the principles of chemistry for the purpose of swindling Marano; his utilisation of the rules of perspective in order to develop his forger's skill.

The early days of his first stay in Rome afford yet one more example of this ability to utilise experience. It is said, and I see no reason to doubt the statement, that in the popularity of engravings among the Roman people, Cagliostro soon perceived a means by which he could make money. The eighteenth century was, as we all know, the golden age of the engraver's art, and in it we see the development and perfection of those processes of mechanical reproduction with which are associated the names of Durer van Siegen, and Prince Rupert. On the other hand, while mass-production methods have the effect of rendering artistic achievement available to the majority of the people, it has also a corollary effect of making the minority the more fond of those works uniquely achieved by hand-skill. Cagliostro must have known this, as he seems to have known all other foibles of the human taste. The print shops of the Corso were filled at that time with those engravings of which Pergolesi's remain to this day such charming examples. They were popular, but they had been more appreciated of the artistic minds of Rome had they been originals rather than reproductions. But how easy for a Count di Cagliostro to give the public what it wanted! The artistic public, that is; the high-class trade; for whom, then as thereafter, the Count was to cater. His powers of draughtsmanship may have been inferior, but his hand was steady and his patience equal to the demands of any task that he set himself. With the aid of a fine quill and a bottle of Indian ink, how easy, by running over the lines of the engraver's burin, to 'ink in' those same lines, and thus turn the common engraving into the appearance of the artist's original work!

Ingenious, but, as it would seem, unprofitable labour. There was no money in it. Would that we knew how those hours were spent which were not employed by the Count in freshening up his engravings! How did he spend them? In the gardens of the Pincio, or in walking along that pleasant avenue which lies outside the Aurelian Wall? Did he sit drowsing in the sun upon the steps of *Trinità de' Monti*, or seek the shade of the little piazza at the bottom of the *Via Francesco Crispi* (but named differently then, of course)?

I think that we shall never know, although we may guess that the good-looking Count, with the soft glance and the disarming manner, did not do too badly. He may well have presented his letters of introduction to their Eminences of York and of Orsini, and—who can say—have dined in the shadow of the purple? All that we do know is that he fell under the influence of a power compared with which that of the Greatest Bridgebuilder is nothing: Balsamo loved.

He loved, the Illustrious Count Alessandro di Cagliostro. And whom?

Her name was Lorenza Feliciani (or Felichiani), for whom one biographer claims 'noble birth', while another says that she was the daughter of a copper-smelter. Both, however, are agreed that she was penniless. She was not above fifteen years of age, and she lived in an alley hard by the Church of the Trinity of the Pilgrims: then, as now, one of the least fashionable of Rome's districts.

Anarchist? Is that how one shall describe a man born, it would seem, to rebel against the arbitrary rules of self-elected and self-seeking rulers?

An anarchist, then. But he submitted to arbitrary rule in one trivial particular, for all that. He married. And this marriage; authenticated, too; was celebrated in the Church of Our Saviour in the Fields, in April, 1769.

Let the poets dwell on the joys of love in an attic-storey: the historian must confine himself to facts. Poor Giuseppe had beauty to gaze upon, and the young Lorenza, no doubt, was the happier in regarding the handsome (if swarthy) features of her husband: but what else had they? One must live, and kisses have never yet proved the staple of existence.

What bounty they had looked for to Lorenza's parents is not known: as Giuseppe was, first and foremost, a man of acute perception:—very little indeed. Even though one historian says that she was of noble birth, while another calls her the daughter of a copper-smelter, both say that she had not a penny for a dowry.

And Giuseppe? What had he for dowering his bride of fifteen? One may imagine the tales that he told: the over-careful tales of his northern County; with a precise reckoning of the feudal dues appertaining to the estate. Men grow more confident as they grow older, but hardly more bold; for boldness is a quality more specially associated with youth, and boldness is, indeed, the outstanding quality which distinguishes Balsamo's early manhood. Thus there may never be a doubt that Balsamo represented himself to his copper-smelting prospective father-in-law as a young man of excellent birth and happy prospects, with whom the necessity of drawing temporarily on the copper-smelter's funds implied no permanent inability to support a wife. One may imagine the

careless: "I'm terribly sorry, but my bankers in Monza must have lost my address: at any rate, their correspondents here do not seem to have received any advice as yet . . ."

It hardly matters what excuses he gave; one may be sure that they were adequate. And this, indeed, is proved by the fact that, immediately after their marriage at San Salvatore, the Balsamos moved into the house of Lorenza's parents.

The Italian of the middle-class, more especially the Italian of the working-class, is noted for his practical sense. No doubt the parents of Lorenza—even though they were, as one authority claims, persons themselves of noble birth—welcomed their daughter's marriage into the noble family of Cagliostro. On the other hand they cannot have reconciled themselves to the supporting indefinitely a son-in-law, however gifted and well-bred. No doubt Cagliostro, with a gentlemanly shrug, had explained to them his talent for drawing with pen and ink, admitting that in those changing times it behoved even a gentleman to select some means of guarding against change of fortune. It is likely that there was no need for him to point out that this talent was as yet unproductive of any great gain, and Lorenza's parents must have listened with a disturbing attention to Giuseppe's plans for his own future. They did not—indeed, they could not have—taken account of any other mode of living than that to which Balsamo was by now become accustomed. I trust that I have made it clear that I have never thought of Balsamo other than as a crook (so the modern phrase has it); a distinguished crook; possibly one of the most distinguished men in the annals of criminality. I shall endeavour to show



hereafter that he was possessed of certain natural gifts which, in another person, might have earned him fame without notoriety; but I have not lost, nor shall I lose, sight of the fact that Balsamo was a scoundrel, and that those natural gifts were by him prostituted to the service of his own deplorable ideals.

Accordingly, it will not surprise the reader to learn that the means selected by Balsamo for establishing his household life were unfortunately marred by that same anti-social spirit which had marked the affairs of Marano and of the Marquess Maurigi. In the past, in his criminal adventures, he had had no lack of associates and assistants, nor now did he intend to act single-handed. Cagliostro was never a lone wolf: he preferred company, and the company that he needed was forthcoming in the person of Lorenza Felichiani, now the Countess di Cagliostro, and the more distinguished for the name that Balsamo conferred upon her: 'Seraphina'. After all, Giuseppe had become Alessandro; why then should Lorenza not become Seraphina?

In all associations of persons, the elder will naturally bear the blame for the acts of the younger, and, accordingly, Cagliostro has been condemned for having seduced the young Lorenza from those paths of virtue in which it is presumed she walked before having met the Count. That she was virtuous has been surmised, her age being called as proof. She was, so some historians have chosen to assume, the ideal type of the girl, 'poor but honest', who suffers a radical change of character consequent upon her falling under the spell of the smooth-spoken villain. To this historian, it seems worthy of note that—

assuming Lorenza to have been the innocent child of other historians' recordings—Cagliostro's inducements to throw in her lot with him, must have been worded in phrases the most plausible and convincing. It is said that, in spite of the fact that his father-in-law offered Cagliostro the means of earning an honest if slender livelihood, the Count preferred to fall upon his own resources, or rather, the resources so happily come by in the person of his young and charming bride. He determined, rather than earn a few scudi in the stifling atmosphere of the copper foundry, to earn a great deal more in the exercise of that ingenious trick known as the 'badger game'. For those innocents to whom this term may be unfamiliar (as, we presume, it was unfamiliar to Lorenza before the Count, with winning smile and ready argument, explained it in detail) I must explain that that trick known as the 'badger game' consists in a woman's inveigling a man into circumstances of great intimacy. After the reasonable preliminaries she promises herself to the ardent suitor, who, for the purpose of enjoying these illicit sweets, accompanies the lady back to her apartment. Arrived there, the lady is no niggard of her love, and the suitor feels that he has indeed chosen as wisely as well. Alas! the path of true love—or even of illicit love—never did run smooth. Almost oblivious of the outer world, so lost is the lover in the transports of passion, he hardly hears the knock upon the door of the chamber. But the lady (whose ears are less deafened by love, and who has, to tell the truth, been expecting such a knock) hears it. She leaps up; she thrusts her lover aside; she grasps her shift to cover her nakedness; and she whispers in a muted voice more terrifying

than the loudest scream: "My husband!" The husbands who play at the badger game never belong to that class whose tragedies reduce French judges to tears; they do not shoot the man who has soiled their marriage bed; stolen their wife; cuckolded themselves; and if they draw a knife or wave a pistol, believe me, reader, these lethal weapons are for intimidation only, and not for use. No, touchy as the husbands are in the matter of their honour, the dismayed wretch, caught in the very act of his folly, as surely as was Ares by the net of Hæphæstus, and as unheroic as only that man may be who stands shamed and shivering in his shirt tails, finds that his outraged vanity may be soothed by other things than his adulterer's blood. There is, of course, a lot of talk (there always is!) but in the end the lover takes his coat, his trousers, and his leave; and surrenders his note-book. This is the way in which the badger game is played: an old game, but the more successful in that its rules have stood the test of time.

One may be sure that Cagliostro knew the rules well indeed, and that easily enough he imparted the necessary principles to the young Lorenza. One gathers that the parents of Lorenza were also not unacquainted with the same rules, and well understood into what evil courses their child was being led by their smooth-tongued son-in-law. The story has it, that, full of indignation, the parents expelled daughter and son-in-law from the little house near the *Trinità de' Pellegrini*, and left them to fend for themselves. From what we know of Cagliostro's character it is not to be supposed that he was otherwise than delighted to have so undeniable an excuse for living his own life in his own way.

We shall see, as we work through the successive phases of this curious history, how Cagliostro's life is marked by a singular fact: that titles of nobility fall as thick upon our ears as did autumnal leaves in Vallombrosa. The titles whose majestic sounds grace the pages of the earlier part of Giuseppe's career are, we must admit, as phony as splendid, with the exception, of course, of those titles to which he merely claimed acquaintance: De Bretteville, Orsini, and York. But afterwards real titles come into the narrative, as we shall see. At this time of his early married life, however, those titles belonging to his friends are open to the gravest suspicion. For instance, he seems to have selected as companion, about the time of his leaving the Felichiani household, a Sicilian gentleman, calling himself the Marquess Agliata, a title not to be found by even the most patient searcher through the rolls of Italian nobility. A certain Ottavio Nicastro made up a trio of villains, and one wonders to what rank Signor Nicastro would have raised himself had his life not been abruptly terminated on the gallows of Rome's public executioner. Such speculations offer admirable exercise to the imaginative mind. But before Nicastro's death, this gentleman, with the Marquess Agliata, entered into a partnership with the Count. The Marquess and the Count made, it seems, a happy discovery: that not only did they share a general capacity for anti-social behaviour, but that their criminality exhibited the pleasing particularity, in that both had evinced a delightful knack of reproducing the peculiarities of other people's styles of penmanship. How charming, then, must have been those gatherings in the delightful little cafés which lie along the Tiber or around

Bellini's fountain in the Piazza Barberini! Three men, united by their determination to extract from life a hundred times more than they were prepared to put into it; two of them sharing in common, not only the means to forge another man's signature, but also a self-granted of nobility. Alas! had only Signor Nicastro made himself Duke of Jerusalem, of Tiebizond, Ispahan; Lord of the Western Seas, or Emperor of Terra Incognita! As it was, somewhat behind in the race, plain Signor Nicastro must have felt a little out of it; a plain gentleman admitted into the company of a Marquess and a Count. Noblesse oblige: but, on the other hand, the lower classes have their pride as well; and Signor Nicastro soothed his vanity, and got his own back on his betters, by laying an information against them; his action being probably not uninfluenced by the thought of the reward with which the Italian constabulary of that time remedied their deficient detective powers. However, in his cups, plain Signor Nicastro boasted of his perfidy, and his two friends were enabled to defeat his villainous plan by taking to their heels. Thus ended Cagliostro's first visit to Rome. What follows on must be regarded as history not altogether susceptible of proof. I shall relate what he is supposed to have done; giving my own reasons for thinking it likely that this is what he actually did; but I shall call the reader's attention to the unsubstantiated nature of certain evidence as I tell the story.

## V

WHERE did the Count and Countess turn their steps on passing out of the Porta San Sebastiano, along the Appian Way? There is mystery here. Lorenza—for, of course, she came with her Alessandro, even though the police were after him—claims that their intention was to make for Germany, and that the Count had availed himself of Agliata's forger's skill (thus the Inquisition-Biographer) in order to provide himself with the *brevet* of a Prussian colonelcy. This sounds to me like the truth. The sect of the Illuminati had not yet been founded by Weishaupt when Seraphina (let us now call her that) and Alessandro left Rome so hurriedly, but the Germany which was to produce, in Weishaupt and Von Knigge, two of the most famous revolutionary mystics of the eighteenth-century, was already steeped in those principles of occultism which were to find a practical form in the events of the French Revolution.

There is an element of mysticism in the German character which has always made Germany peculiarly the happy hunting-ground of those who prey on the superstitions of others. The history of the German principalities shews an alarming number of their rulers to have wasted their time in the vain pursuit of alchemical dreams. It was to Germany that Bernard of Trèves went in order to see the philosopher's stone which had been discovered by the confessor of the Emperor Frederick III; it was Germany which

gave to the world such alchemists as Albertus Magnus, born at Lawingen in Neuberg; Trithemius, born in Tritheim; Paracelsus, whose real name was Hohenheim; and George Agricola, whose real name was Bauer. Alchemy was patronised by the Emperors Maximilian, Frederick II, Frederick III and Rodolph II, while the number of that science's patrons to be found among the minor princes of Germany is almost beyond belief. The Devil surely found work for *those* idle hands!

It had been in Germany that the Rosicrucian sect had first appeared, and it was in Germany that the *convulsionists* of St. Médard found their most numerous and enthusiastic imitators. It was in Germany that, even now, Father Hell, in the University of Vienna, was experimenting with the magnetic cure of diseases, applying himself to an empiric which was to make the name of his pupil, Mesmer, famous throughout the Western world. Yes, there was no folly to which, in Germany, they would not give a hearing; and I cannot imagine that the two travellers would have thought their education in charlatanry complete without a visit to the country where the kings harboured even those who were plotting their own ruin. How much more, then, would the common people give welcome to their plunderers! We may believe the story of Seraphina's, that it was to Germany that they intended to go: they had been the sort of fools which they most decidedly were not, had they gone anywhere else. And I believe the report which says that it was with the intention of visiting the Count de St. Germain that Cagliostro set out over the rutted, rounded tufa-blocks of the ancient Appian Way.

Did he know the Count de St. Germain? Who can say? Would it have deterred Cagliostro's going to see the Count that he did not? We know well that it had done nothing of the sort! The corner-boy of the Palermo alleys may have given himself his title, and adopted some superficial evidences of good-breeding; but we, who know the world, know that the more subtle spiritual and mental marks of the well-born are not so quickly learnt, because they are not so obvious to the eye as are the actions of deportment. The Count di Cagliostro might have learnt the tricks of ball-room dancing and the etiquette to be observed in handing a lady into her carriage, but his gutter-impudence could hardly have given way, as yet, to the careful deliberations of the worldly-wise crook. Ten years were to pass before he could affect to scorn the invitation of the Cardinal-Prince de Rohan, the better to secure admission to his palace. Sixteen-year-old Seraphina and twenty-year-old Alessandro would have rushed with all youth's impetuosity (possessed even by the criminal classes) at their objective: in this case, the most famous alchemist in the world.

Can we not imagine Alessandro, endeavouring, in talk, to buttress up his confidence, discussing the matter with his Seraphina? Arguing, of course, both for and against the visit, but always winding up each phase of his argument with a loudly proclaimed: "I don't see why I *shouldn't*! After all, Althotas taught me a thing or two, that I bet this so-called Count would like to know." And all the time believing implicitly in the genuineness of the Count de St. Germain's pretensions, which has been the way with charlatans since the world began. *Of*



*course* they went to Sleswig; to the man who could take the flaw out of diamonds; and who remembered having warned Jesus Christ of the danger of opposing the civil authority.

Very little has been written, relatively speaking, about this extraordinary man, who comprised in his character almost every quality for which the eighteenth-century is memorable: its cynicism, its love of beauty, its inflexible worship of self.

Who he was we do not know. It was given out that he was the son of a salamander, but such miraculous births are the exception rather than the rule, and it is likely that the Count de St. Germain came into the world in the same orthodox manner that most of us observe. Like Cagliostro's, his face had a certain Jewish character, which may or may not be adduced as evidence that Cagliostro did, indeed, visit St. Germain, for it is well known that persons of Jewish blood are renowned for the help that they afford each other. This Hebrew cast of countenance led some to suppose him to be the Wandering Jew; but it is probable that he was the son of a wealthy Portuguese Jew, a merchant living at Bordeaux. Of Jewish birth he may not have been, but there was, indeed, something wholly traditional in the fact that he should have first sold his 'elixir of life' in Germany. The elixir was, no doubt, a strong aphrodisiac: nor had it need to be anything else. When one is feeling in the best of health; when one enjoys (or seems to enjoy) the fullest possession of one's physical powers; then the end appears to be far off. The truly healthy man may not feel otherwise than immortal.

The Count de St. Germain—we know him by no other name—went to Germany with his wonderful

elixir: cantharides, yohimbe, powdered rhinoceros-horn . . . Does it matter what it was? And among his first clients was the aged Marshal de Belle-Isle, to whom St. Germain sold a dram of the elixir. The Marshal soon fell under the spell of the Count's ready tongue, and induced the vendor of elixirs to accompany him to Paris; there to take up his abode. We may be sure that it was for just such an invitation that the Count had been playing, just as I am sure that it was for just such an invitation that Cagliostro went to Sleswig.

The Marshal introduced his protégé into the most distinguished circles of Parisian society (an easier matter then than now) and soon Paris was as enchanted with the stranger's wit and learning as was the Marshal. There seems to have been no doubt that St. Germain was, at this time, above seventy years of age, and that—or so his contemporaries affirm—he looked no more than forty-five. Unlike his better-known imitator, he was a man of really profound learning, and equally unlike Cagliostro, he kept the sources of his income an impenetrable secret. Madame du Hausset, in her memoirs, testifies to the fine quality of the diamonds that St. Germain wore about his person, and to the costliness of the presents that he so often made to the ladies of the Court. He was much liked by King Louis XV, who reproved someone who had scoffed at the Count's pretensions, and he was admitted—a high mark of favour, this!—into the dressing-room of Madame de Pompadour. With these distinguished patrons to ensure his social success it is no wonder that the Count de St. Germain soon became the most notable of all those oddities who flocked to Paris in the eighteenth-century, after they had served their

apprenticeship in imposture in states and cities further east. It is unthinkable that one could read the history of an eighteenth-century charlatan and not find that he started in Germany and brought the mature practice of his art to Paris.

There is no doubt about it : St. Germain was a most superior type of rogue. The source of his wealth he always kept, as I have said, a secret, nor would he accept any but the most inexpensive of gifts. To the credulous he sold his elixir, but to his friends he admitted that a strict diet and a generally healthy mode of living would do more for one than any elixir; and those of his friends to whom he confided this advice went away enchanted with the honesty of a man who could so openly admit a fraud. He thus acquired in Parisian society something the reputation of a Robin Hood; of a man who would plunder all but his friends. Yet it is difficult to see how, with the disadvantage to his trade that these admissions must have implied, the sale of his elixir can have produced all those riches of which his contemporaries speak with such astonishment. The Baron von Gleichen tells us that the Count once showed him so many jewels that the Baron imagined himself to be looking at the treasure of Aladdin's Cave; while on another occasion St. Germain shewed Mme de Pompadour a box containing topazes, emeralds and diamonds worth a half-million of livres. M. de Gontant testifies to the fact that Mme de Pompadour once asked the Count to let her examine his diamond knee- and shoe-buckles, they being of so fine a water. Their value, says M. de Gontant, cannot have been less than two hundred thousand livres<sup>1</sup>. Voltaire claimed

<sup>1</sup> The equivalent then of £8,000 sterling.

that he was an agent of Pitt's . . . but what agent of Pitt's was ever paid at so generous a rate? Mackay says, "There appears no doubt that he possessed the secret of removing spots from diamonds; and in all probability he gained considerable sums by buying at inferior prices such as had flaws in them, and afterwards disposing of them at a profit of cent. per cent." But Mackay does not suggest a method by which, short of cutting, a flaw may be removed from one of the hardest natural substances known to man. No, he is probably more accurate in his guess when he says (in speaking of St. Germain's treasure-hoard): "He affected to despise all this wealth, to make the world more easily believe that he could, *like the Rosicrucians*<sup>1</sup>, draw precious stones out of the earth by the magic of his song."

Mark the phrase that I have put into italic type: '*Like the Rosicrucians*'. Here, I think, is the secret of St. Germain's wealth. He *was* a Rosicrucian, and he was in the pay of dark, subversive forces, and, possibly in the pay, as well, of the enemies of France. Voltaire most positively states, in a letter dated April 5th, 1758, that he was the confidant of Choiseul, Kaunitz and Pitt. This letter was addressed to the King of Prussia, and though Mackay scoffs at the charge made by the philosopher, it would not be the first time in history that revolutionaries made use of charlatan-mystics, if it be true that St. Germain was so employed, nor was the employment of the monk, Rasputin, by the German General Staff the last time that it will have happened. No, we must remember that it was from Germany that the wave of revolutionary mysticism was to rise which, so soon after,

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

was to engulf Europe, and under which our world is still submerged. Only by assuming that St. Germain was the tool (or, it may be, more than the tool) of a revolutionary sect may we explain his otherwise inexplicable wealth, since the other explanations: that he was a repairer of diamonds, or that he was the discoverer of hidden treasure, are so improbable as to need no examination.

St. Germain lived for some years in Paris, the friend of the King and his mistress, and of most of the other members of Parisian society. He left Paris at the urgent request of his friend, the Duke of Hesse-Cassel, with whom he went to live, and at whose court he remained until his death in 1784. We know nothing of his career after his leaving Paris.

May, then, this writer be permitted to assume that his activities—apart from his tales of his life in the Middle Ages—were not entirely unconnected with revolutionary mysticism? If that were so, then Cagliostro's footsteps were directed towards greater things than the faking of engravings or the telling of fortunes.

## VI

OFF to Sleswig, then, we must imagine the two travellers—hardly more than children, remember—setting forth, beguiling the tedium of the journey with love-making, to which the ardour of their youthful appetites and the sanction of Mother Church made equal contributions. For have I not said that Lorenza was a young lady well brought-up, for all that Papa was in reduced circumstances? and surely we may attribute her so readily having agreed to throw in her lot with her charming but dishonest husband, less to a natural wickedness than to a proper sense of the obedience that a wife owes to the man she has married? What a delightful pair they must have seemed! Those engravings of them which remain may never justly convey the beauty of their youthful faces: Alessandro's—plump, smooth, olive-skinned, and dark-eyed; curling hair of deepest black, and lips redder than cherries; Seraphina's: pale-skinned; with long, straight nose; small, but delicately curved lips; and eyes, deep-set beneath thin, arched brows. And how pleasant must life have seemed to them, setting out on their great adventure (the *shirri* forgotten by now) in the balmy airs of the Roman spring!

In itself, youth holds a great attractiveness for the older; how much more attractive is that which is not only youthful, but beautiful and witty! Can one wonder that their none-too-hurried journey

northwards was not marked by any distressing absence of life's necessities? At the town of Loretto, so it is said, the Governor was easily induced to part with fifty sequins to the handsome couple who had just presented a letter of introduction from His Eminence of Orsini.

Agliata, you must remember, was still with them. He had flown the Papal capital with his two young friends, after the odious Nicastro's betrayal. So now the artistic talents of the Marquess were called upon, as the trio arrived at Bergamo. Agliata, who had already provided the Count with the forged brevet of a Prussian colonelcy, now announced that he was recruiting for the Prussian army; but the life that the trio had lived since leaving Rome had hardly been conducive to the establishment of a sound reputation, and as they had travelled northwards leisurely enough, it seems that there were many not unacquainted with their arts who had arrived at Bergamo ahead of them. Agliata, with the quick nose of his sort for any threatened trouble, instantly perceived that the three were viewed with suspicion by the authorities. A domiciliary visit by one of the agents of the Governor soon decided him in his course. He travels the farthest who travels alone, and Agliata—Marquess or no Marquess—was not loading himself with unnecessary encumbrances. Accordingly, he left the Count and Countess to fend for themselves, and it was they who were arrested when the police arrived at their hotel.

That they succeeded in clearing themselves is a fact of history (how much, I wonder, had the innocent eyes of Seraphina to do with the magistrates' decision?). But now followed one of the hardest times of lives

that only in childhood and at the end knew real distress. The Marquess, with well-born thoughtlessness, had taken with him, in his hasty departure, all the band's ready cash; so that now, even though they had their liberty, Alessandro and Seraphina found themselves with little more. Let this be said of them, that although to dig they were unable, to beg they were certainly not ashamed, and that they thereafter followed a tortuous way across Europe on which their dues were paid by the charity always and readily evoked by Seraphina's blue eyes.

This writer, for reasons before stated, inclines to the view that Cagliostro did visit Sleswig; but the details of their journey from Rome to London are not at all clear, nor, it must be confessed, at all well authenticated. One must remember that, in preparing a life of Balsamo, we may rely in no case upon the testimony of the unbiased witness. We have the biography prepared under the auspices of the Holy Inquisition—hardly an unbiased account!—and we have Cagliostro's own account of himself; but this written at such a time and in such circumstances as must incline us if not altogether to view it with disbelief, then to accept it with the very greatest reservation. The editor of the *Courrier de l'Europe*, Theveneau de Morande, was a man so spiteful that nothing good that might be said of a man would interest him in the least, and thus *his* account of Cagliostro must also be accepted with the same reserve. The Memoirs of Abbé Georgel, Madame du Hausset and the rest of the Court tattlers, may be accepted equally suspiciously, because of the obvious credulity of their writers; while the *Authentic Memoirs of the Count di Cagliostro* is the fabrication of the



Marquess de Luchet. The pamphlet *Cagliostro Unmasked at Warsaw in 1780* must suffer from the lack of authority under which labour all anonymous productions of this sort. It seems astonishing that about one so famous there should be so little known that is positively susceptible of proof, but have I not, in expressing this somewhat paradoxical fact, given the very reason why Cagliostro's life lacks documentary evidence of fact? There comes a time in the lives of all who achieve fame or notoriety when the desire to claim acquaintance with them will impel those who have not that acquaintance to fabricate stories intended to show the closeness of a relationship which does not, in truth, exist. How often have we ourselves, whenever the newspapers have been filled with the mention of this or that famous person, not heard the whispered confidence: the 'real story' of what happened. The newspapers, of course, have got it all wrong? 'I know for a fact . . .' say these chroniclers of the unpublished; and on that phrase how many strange histories have not been launched! One must remember that every history that we possess of the Count dates from a time when his name was on everyone's lips. Strange as are some of the things set down in these histories, how much stranger had they been had every tit-bit of rumour found a place in them!

## §

All men, said the prophet, are liars, but the hardest thing to encounter in this world is the deliberate untruth. Most lies are either exaggerations of the truth, perversions of the truth, or suppressions of

the truth; lies are like planets flying round the central luminary of the truth; some near, some far; some bathed in its warmth, and some in the dim light of outer space; but all of them having an undeniable relationship with the central fact of truth. It is the penalty of fame that men talk about it; indeed, that is all that fame is. John Smith's life from birth to death, is far less capable of any such confusing things as happen to the lives of (say) Hitler or Mussolini. It is not moving through the world with every man's eye fixed upon you that renders your life story the better known; rather is it the contrary, where the very insignificance of your actions will make them no fit subject for exaggeration and misconstruction. The duty of the biographer is less to record than to interpret. For a mere slavish recording of all that has been set down on paper would not serve the purposes of truth. There must be analysis, not only of the character of the subject, but also, though in a lesser degree, analysis of the characters of those who recorded his actions. Exaggeration in itself does not give the lie to truth; it is the truthful men who exaggerate, for exaggeration is mostly the wish to see things as they might be rather than to see them as they are. Whereas the liar usually sticks to his lie, for, wishing it to pass as truth, he may never permit himself the least embroidery on its already carefully arranged form. That exaggeration in itself need not necessarily imply the unreliableness of any story is very well shown in the business of King Arthur, that romantic figure of our childhood. For a long time he was thought to be, simply because of the fantastically exaggerated account of his exploits, a figure of pure legend, as imaginary as Gog or Magog,

Lud and Bladud.<sup>1</sup> We know now that he did exist, and that the exaggerations which have come upon his true history—which, may be, we shall never know—have come simply because of the fact that he was admired. Hate does not breed exaggeration; only admiration does that; and thus our examination of the accounts of Balsamo's life yield us our first great discovery: that the Count di Cagliostro was *admired* of his contemporaries. We shall try later to account for this admiration.

But to return to the Count and the Countess; now standing in their room in the posting house at Bergamo; wondering how they can leave without paying their reckoning, and yet keep their baggage. At moments like this, the pensive mind finds itself reflecting on the curious suddenness of the metamorphosis by which the smiling, compliant, friendly innkeeper is changed into a creature no less full of rudeness than of suspicion. This is not the time to offer him your prints, however genuine; this is not the time, with red chalk and dog-Latin, to summon up the spirit of his loved grandmother; this is not even the time—as the author knows only too well—to mention drafts on the Bank of England. The only thing that may be mentioned with propriety now is *cash*. Would that some Boswell had attended upon Cagliostro from the beginning; some biographer gifted with prescience as well as observation, who might have detected in the young traveller in the Bergamo inn, the chrysalis of that splendid butterfly of a decade later! How I should love to know the phrases with which he soothed the suspicions of the innkeeper—an, Italian innkeeper, mark you!—one of the hardest

<sup>1</sup> If, indeed, even these are imaginary characters!

nuts to crack in this hard world; to have known what part Seraphina, either with tears or with dimpled smiles (or, maybe, both) played in their getting free. In Italy today, imprisonment is the penalty for non-payment of debt; in the Italy of the eighteenth century matters were no better. And yet we find them on their way, birds of passage on perhaps too soaring pinions. One can imagine that scene in the upstairs room, where, after a reassuring pat on her shoulder, and a reassuring swig of *grappa* for himself, Cagliostro turned to the apprehensive but trusting Seraphina with a quiet, "leave it to me, dear!", and buttoning his coat and straightening his cravat, drew a deep breath and went down to cope with the bill. With persons of Cagliostro's sort, these unpleasant tasks are but the stepping stones upon which they rise to higher things. Practice makes perfect, and it is better to practise upon people whom one is never likely to see again. Besides, there is joy in a thing well done; a joy that only the true artist may know; and possibly, as he lay in his lightless dungeon in San Leo, comforting himself in his present misery with the thoughts of all those triumphs that the world once offered in such abundance, possibly the swindling of the inn-keeper of a few *scudi* ranked as high in Cagliostro's mind as many more spectacular achievements.

A tale that is told has it that Cagliostro, observing with his quick eye the delightfully work-free condition of the pilgrims—more numerous then in Italy than now (when Il Duce has discouraged the sentimentalising of idleness)—conceived the notion of enrolling his delightful young wife and his no less attractive self into that happy band of God's wanderers who, staff in hand and tin cockle-shell in hat, set out on

their pious voyagings to seek the shrine where, an infinitesimal speck among its incrustations of precious stones and metals, lies preserved some ossuary fragment; some rag; some bone; or some hank of hair; which once formed part of the living corpus of Sanctity itself. In two thousand years much may be done with really acceptable ideas; and when St. Paul, looking for his travelling expenses in the cause of Christianity, laid down as an axiom of ecclesiastical government that they who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel, did even his clear mind envisage the adaptations of that idea? so that soon the Christian world would find it necessary to support not only those who preached for Christ, but those who walked for Christ, and starved on top of high pillars for Christ, and lived in caves in the Egyptian Desert for Christ, and idled in honour of their Redeemer, and walked in His praise? Of all these admirable ways of singing the beauty and the majesty of God, Alessandro and Seraphina chose the ambulatory method; to two such dynamic souls a bout of penitential pole-squatting would have appeared unnecessarily restricting. So, at least the story has it. They set off for the shrine of Santiago de Compostella, the most splendid shrine in Christendom, now that the treasures of Walsingham and Canterbury had gone to buy wives and battleships for King Henry VIII, and their lands to provide England with a new aristocracy. How true is this story of the Count's intention we have no means of knowing; but there is no reason utterly to reject it. It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive, and after all, why not the greatest shrine of Christendom rather than any other destination? Tales of its blazing magnificence must surely have come to that pious household in which

Giuseppe had lived his early years; and pilgrims returned from Compostella as well as set out for it. It was the custom, too, for these pilgrims to give some little return for the alms which, in God's name, they begged, by telling the generous faithful of the wonders that they had seen: the very manger in which our Saviour had lain in His swaddling clothes, among the rustling straw, and warmed by the sweet breath of kine; the house at Loretto, carried one night by angels from Palestine, and in which the Holy Family had lived; the tumbled figures of the Gods of old Egypt, riven as by a thunder-bolt, lying in the sand as they had lain during all the years since the day when the Bambino's entry into Egypt had caused them to fall down. Of these, and many other wonders, would the pilgrims talk; and they talked, too, of the riches of the splendid shrines which housed these sacred relics: the cloth with which Veronica had wiped the face of Christ; the lance with which the Centurion had pierced His side, and the crown of thorns with which in mockery the soldiers had crowned Him; the winding sheet in which Nicodemus had wrapped Him; even the little shirt that He had worn as a child. But what must most have interested the wide-eyed Giuseppe, as he listened to these tales, was the description of the splendid and populous cities which had sprung up about these foci of adoration: the churches; the public buildings; the vast piazzas crowded with merchants and travellers and pilgrims, converged from the ends of Christendom; the sumptuous hotels catering for the demands of the most princely of visitors; surely even his normally pious desire to see these holy places cannot have been untinged by the thought

of the plunder so vast a concourse of people might be expected to yield ?

Anyhow, let us assume that they went from Bergamo with the idea of becoming pilgrims. We have Seraphina's word that it was so, and that they moved along the Riviera from Milan to Barcelona; following the traditional conduct of pilgrims; clad in garments of fustian; clasping their staves, and telling their big wooden beads. This account was given at the time of Seraphina's arrest in Paris, in the year 1772, to which I shall make allusion later, but it is interesting to note that some verification of their journey—call it pilgrimage if you like—has been supplied by no less a person than the famous Casanova; another plunderer, but who demanded, as his tribute, hearts as well as money. The encounter took place in the year 1770 in an hotel in Aix-en-Provence. The outstanding characteristic of Casanova; indeed, one might say with truth, the impelling motive force of his whole life; was his insatiate curiosity—and he found his curiosity excited in the most lively way by the appearance and behaviour of Alessandro and his wife. He records in his *Memoirs* how the whole hotel had been thrown into a flutter by the extravagant manner in which the Count and Countess had distributed alms and presents; something indicating an agreeable change in fortune for two who had set out to collect alms themselves. Successful pilgrims! For pilgrims they still were, despite the financial success which had blessed their devout wanderings. How one wishes that Casanova had carried his inquisitiveness to the point of impertinence, and had deliberately pumped the noble travellers! What stories he might not have told! for Aix is several hundred miles from Milan,

and all sorts of adventures worth—well worth—our hearing must have occurred between the time when the Cagliostros left Bergamo owing their reckoning and the time when they arrived at Aix so flush that the poor of the town were loud in praise of their generosity. Listen now to the description of them that Casanova gives us:

“I found the female pilgrim seated in a chair, looking like a person exhausted with fatigue, and interesting by reason of her youth and beauty; singularly heightened by a touch of melancholy and by a crucifix of yellow metal, six inches long, that she held in her hand. Her companion, who was arranging shells on his coat of black baize, made no movement; he appeared to intimate, by the looks he cast at his wife, that I was to attend to her alone.”

From which it would appear that that amiable mammal, the badger, had not altogether retired in favour of that delightful mollusc, the cockle.

“And where are you going to, my pretty maid?” Casanova asked her.

She explained, with an upward glance of those limpid, innocent blue eyes:

“We are going on foot, living on charity; the better to obtain God’s mercy; God, Whom I have so often offended. Though I ask only a sou in charity, people always give me pieces of silver and gold.”—Surely now those blue eyes were veiled so that the long lashes spread their silken fans on the delicate rose of her cheeks?—“And thus, arriving at a town, we are forced to distribute to the poor all that we have above our simple needs, so as not to commit the sin of losing confidence in the Divine Providence.”



Casanova knew—or thought he knew—too much concerning the frailty of our human nature, altogether to accept without reservation this artless tale. Another commentator, namely the Inquisition-Biographer, rejects it utterly. He regards the gold and silver that he admits the Countess did indeed receive, less as the evidence of pious charity, than as part of a perfectly common commercial transaction, and as payment for services most complacently rendered. He goes so far as to suggest a really wholesale affair with the garrison at Antibes, the Count prudently affecting a discreet blindness. There is, indeed, little doubt that Seraphina, The Little Lady Seraph, possessed the reputation in the eyes of the Inquisition-Biographer of being hardly more than a Madonna of the Sleeping Cars, or to commit no anachronism, a Madonna of all the post-chaises and posting-houses from Rome to Milan; from Milan to Provence; from Provence to Antibes; and so to Barcelona; and thence to Paris. Nor does he give her the credit of supposing that repentance overcame her even in that grey northern capital. The Count and Countess visited Madrid and Lisbon, but they never arrived at the shrine of St. James of Compostella. As I said before, it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive; and surely, in the profusion of the alms that their travelling had enabled them to disburse, we may see the vindication of such hopeful voyaging?

## VII

WE must digress here. Before we go on to follow the further adventures of the bewitching Seraphina and her broad-minded husband, it will be necessary to examine an objection which has been raised by one of Cagliostro's biographers, Mr. W. R. H. Trowbridge, to the assumption that Giuseppe Balsamo of Palermo was one and the same with the Count Alessandro di Cagliostro. It is of no importance that I myself have failed to see any valid reasons why this objection should ever have been raised. The fact that Mr. Trowbridge *has* raised this point makes it imperative that the objection be examined. He claims, to anticipate somewhat the events of our narrative, that the last mention of Balsamo, *as Balsamo*, occurs with Giuseppe's leaving Paris in 1773. After that, as all historians must admit, Seraphina and her husband appear in contemporary records as the Count and Countess di Cagliostro. What Mr. Trowbridge—or, rather, the logical mind of Mr. Trowbridge—cannot reconcile with the fact that Cagliostro and Balsamo were one and the same is this: that Cagliostro on assuming his title, did not register his change of name before a notary-public. From what I have already told the reader of Balsamo's character and mode of living (no more than what Mr. Trowbridge himself admits to be true) it would indeed be surprising if such change of name, to say nothing of such appreciation of status, should have

been registered. When those of our criminals who appear before the magistrates are confronted, from police records, with a series of fanciful aliases that it has pleased them to adopt, does the judge take into account that these pseudonyms were not duly registered by Deed Poll? No, of course he doesn't, provided that the evidence of identity holds.

However, let us examine Mr. Trowbridge's objection. He claims that there is no *proof* that Balsamo and Cagliostro were the same. I leave out of my argument altogether that accepted proof of the fact which is called 'common knowledge'. My own argument in favour of the identity of these two persons is based, I admit, on the fact that contemporaries never doubted that identity; but Mr. Trowbridge having demanded proof, let us see what we may offer in the way of proof. He admits, primarily, that the surname of Cagliostro's wife was the same with that of Balsamo's, and that both women (if indeed there were two) came from Rome. He says that we may dismiss as of no importance this fact. But may we? I find it to be unthinkable that two men sharing in the eyes of their contemporaries a single identity, should have shared also the surname of their wife; or does Mr. Trowbridge suggest, working *a posteriori*, that it was upon such a coincidental similarity that the people of Cagliostro's day evolved the theory that he and Balsamo were one and the same? I might consider this argument had Mr. Trowbridge advanced it. He does not. Accordingly, he seeks to claim as pure coincidence the following three facts:

1. The identity was admitted throughout that portion of Cagliostro's life following the affair of the Diamond Necklace.

2. Balsamo and Cagliostro each had a wife whose surname was Felichiani (*or* Feliciani).

3. Lorenza's account of herself, given in 1772 to the Paris police (i.e. at a time before Mr. Trowbridge sets the change from Balsamo to Cagliostro) says quite clearly that the two left Lisbon for London, while Mr. Trowbridge himself admits that the couple calling themselves the Count and Countess di Cagliostro arrived in London—at Whitcomb Street, Leicester Fields—announcing that they had come straight from Portugal.<sup>1</sup>

I am not one to deny the existence of coincidence, but why is it necessary to invoke the fact of coincidence in order to deny what has hitherto been accepted as fact in itself?

Mr. Trowbridge suggests, with a certain plausibility, that this identity was fabricated by Theveneau de Morande, the Editor of the *Courrier de l'Europe*; a theory that I shall examine in its proper place.

At any rate, there is no doubt in my mind that it was Giuseppe and Lorenza Balsamo who came from Lisbon to London. What follows is, I admit, taken from the account of the Balsamos as given by De Morande. As, owing to this man's reputation for subordinating the truth to his own ends, we shall have to accept his account with reservation, it would not be profitable too closely to detail the story he tells. According to De Morande they first took rooms in Leadenhall Street, and afterwards moved to New Compton Street, a district more fashionable then than it is now. De Morande makes scurrilous references to the means by which Lorenza provided the housekeeping money,

<sup>1</sup> Although, of course, this was their *second* visit to England. Still, the mention of Portugal is significant.

and he goes on further—incidentally, weakening his argument—by stating that Lorenza had, as a harlot, but indifferent success. If this were so, then such ill success may be attributed not to any lack of beauty, but to the fact that she had not mastered the English tongue sufficiently to ask for the correct price of her favours. He claims, too, that her old friend the badger was summoned from his earth for the despoiling of a Quaker, the gain in monetary terms being £100. But what is important in this over biased account of De Morande's, is the fact that he distinctly mentions that Balsamo secured employment with a painter of the name of Pergolesi—we are not told whether or no that same Pergolesi whose work so greatly influenced the Adam brothers, and whose engravings may yet be seen on the walls of English drawing-rooms. One is reminded here of Balsamo's inability to reject anything of profit by which he had once come, and one finds that the drawing lessons of Palermo days were not forgotten as a source of income. For we see him again adopting a similar means of livelihood, after having proved to himself that Lorenza's beauty was insufficient to extract from the pockets of English lechers a competency. I think this iteration of De Morande's on Lorenza's failure as a street-walker is the weakest point in his whole dubious argument. It was well known that Lorenza Felichiani was a woman of extreme beauty. The truth is that her methods of extracting money from men were infinitely more subtle than is implied in a perambulation along the Soho streets.

De Morande says that it was owing to his failure to make a living as a *maquereau* that Balsamo inclined once more to an artistic profession. There was a

certain Doctor Benamore, whom De Morande calls 'the envoy of the King of Barbary', who purchased some of Balsamo's drawings. The Doctor failed to make payment for these, and Balsamo was obliged to take the matter to court. Unfortunately, however—one presumes that the Doctor pleaded diplomatic privilege—Balsamo had the case given against him and, as, having paid the costs, he was unable to pay his rent, the landlord secured a warrant for his arrest. What follows on now is either the truth, or a lie based on a very certain knowledge of the Balsamos' character. For listen to what De Morande has to say. Ignoring his sneering reference to Lorenza's failure as a strumpet (was it, I wonder, because he had failed to make the grade?) the rest we may well accept. The Editor says that she moved from the streets to the churches; sitting there or kneeling in attitudes of the most devout kind; mumbling prayers with a face so rapt in suffering that it had melted the heart of a Caligula; and piping her eyes with so daintily pathetic a gesture that Satan himself might have ceased from his evil labours in order to render her material comfort. Actually the help arrived in the person of Sir Edward Hales who, touched by this young woman's distress, fetched her husband out of the lock-up, and gave him a commission to decorate with frescoes the ceilings of his Canterbury house. If, as I suspect, Balsamo's London employer was indeed that Pergolesi who is well known as an engraver of that time, I think that it is not straining the credulity of the reader by suggesting that this commission was secured on the strength rather of a selection of Pergolesi's own sketches than of a show of Balsamo's own indifferent work. Sir Edward, however, took four months to discover that

Balsamo, in whichever direction his talents might have lain, certainly had no great talent for the depicting those scenes of classical amorousness which were the taste of the period. The amorousness, indeed, was confined to that plane which lies beneath the ceiling, and Balsamo's appointment was abruptly and rudely terminated when Sir Edward discovered that Giuseppe was teaching his daughter those charming ways of passing the time in which the Gods had whiled away the long hours on Olympus; ways that Balsamo, though he might not be able to present them pictorially, found only too easy to describe in more personal fashion.

Lorenza and Giuseppe then went to Paris.

## VIII

A SEA voyage, so the advertisements of the shipping companies would have us believe, sets one up. Had shipping companies in 1771 gone in for advertising on modern lines, no doubt they would have been pleased to have had the Balsamos' endorsement of their claim, for most certainly that sea voyage across the channel set the Balsamos up.

On the cross-channel packet, fellow-traveller with Giuseppe and Lorenza, was a M. Duplessis de la Radotte. A servant in his country's Indian Civil Service, this gentleman was now returning to France to take up an appointment in the employ of the Marquess de Prie. To be brief, Lorenza found the means of making the acquaintance of this man, and in the short time of the crossing, that acquaintance ripened into friendship, so much so that, on arriving on French soil, M. de la Radotte offered Lorenza his seat in his coach, an invitation which, naturally, she did not decline. Balsamo followed on horseback. In Paris husband and wife were lodged *chez* M. de la Radotte, but the arrangement was destined to be an unhappy one. We suspect that the intention of Balsamo and his wife was to use in their new-found friend a source of income; at any rate, a temporary home; but apparently it did not embrace the question of their friend's falling madly in love with Lorenza. Nor did Balsamo's schemes take account of the fact that Lorenza should decide to accept the kindness of her protector on her own. De la Radotte suggested



that Lorenza leave Balsamo and become his mistress, a proposition which Lorenza seems to have accepted. One may imagine Balsamo's horror when he learnt of this perfidy; a horror only giving way to a righteous indignation as he discovered that Lorenza really meant to leave him. But there are the laws of Man as well as the laws of God, and if a woman will not consider herself bound by the Ten Commandments, then the police must be called upon to show her the errors of her ways, and bring back her pretty feet into the paths of perfection. To the Courts went Balsamo, and asked that his wife, his Lorenza, his little lady angel, the vindication of his manhood, the hope of his future, and the probable comfort of his declining years, be returned to him. The law in France at that time made such dereliction of one's husband without his consent a penal offence; and having, on the evidence, been convicted, Lorenza was sent to Ste. Pélagie, where, for the moment, she was safe both from her lover and from her husband.

It is from her dossier in the French archives that we learn Lorenza's version of that elaborate trip, armed only with staff, cockle shell, purity of heart and belief in God, which started at Milan and ended in Lisbon. Under French law, the *question* was still permitted to be applied, and while it is unthinkable that the French magistracy, as susceptible to feminine beauty as is the majority of Frenchmen, should have subjected her to torture, it is equally unthinkable (or so I find it) that faced with the possibility of *la peine forte et dure*, Lorenza should not have fallen over herself in her eagerness to tell the truth. Remember, she was only a child, despite her alarming precocity in the matter of wayward conduct.



MARIE ANTOINETTE  
THE PORTRAIT BY VICKI LI BRUN

[Reschgate Studios]



This dossier, compiled in 1772, was discovered in the archives in 1786, just after the time when Cagliostro and his Countess had appeared in Court charged with complicity in the affair of the Diamond Necklace. Mr. Trowbridge finds that its appearance, or discovery, in 1786, cast doubt on its genuineness. I understand him to imply that its appearance at this critical time was too providential to be genuine; but might it not be argued with equal propriety that had it not been for the affair of the Diamond Necklace, no one had thought of disinterring it at all? In fact, had Cagliostro not come before the Parisian Court, what reason had there been why the dossier of Lorenza Balsamo be disinterred at all, or, at least, until such time as the history of Cagliostro had come to be written? Mr. Trowbridge also finds it extraordinary that, of all those persons mentioned in the dossier, with whom the Balsamos were supposed to be connected, none should have come forward at the time of the Diamond Necklace affair, and testified to the fact that Balsamo and Cagliostro were the same.<sup>1</sup> He mentions that Goethe tells how, on his visiting Palermo, he found those people who remembered Balsamo willing to discover a likeness in the published portraits of Cagliostro. Mr. Trowbridge, while admitting that Cagliostro may have changed in the years since the affair of Duplessis, will not admit that the Countess had changed at all. I agree. How then, says he, if Cagliostro and Balsamo were the same, did not all those people whom Balsamo knew in 1772 come forward in 1785 in order to testify to the identity? Two answers occur to me: 1. That there was no need to testify to something that for a short time Cagliostro himself denied; which denial may well have impelled

<sup>1</sup> Or were not.

people to hold their tongue; and 2. That all those people whom Balsamo and his wife claimed to have known were not, in reality, friends of theirs. We have seen that Mr. Trowbridge casts doubts on Giuseppe's claim that he was introduced to Cardinals York and Orsini. Why then should he suppose these later claims of acquaintanceship to be more genuine?

We now come to a curious business: a rift in the orderly sequence of the story. That what follows is part of Balsamo's history does not seem to be doubted, but I find it hard to assign to it its proper place in his life. Mr. Trowbridge sets it as after Balsamo's leaving Paris in 1772, and I follow his precedent in so far as I mention it now rather than having mentioned it earlier. On the other hand, I must confess to a feeling that it belongs to an earlier part of his career, and I would feel more inclined to assign it to that period between Balsamo's leaving Rome and coming to England for the first time. However, leaving questions of chronology out of it, here is the story.

Having forgiven his wife, and having pleaded successfully with the Courts to release her from prison, Balsamo and Lorenza left Paris, not without reason. Money must have been rather scarce, with the bread-winner locked up in Ste. Pélagie; and debt in France, then, as today, was no laughing matter. We are told that they went to Paris and Brussels; where they truly went we do not, as yet, know. The poet Goethe, however, is a more trustworthy witness than the Inquisition-Biographer. The German interested himself in the career of this extraordinary man Cagliostro (note, incidentally, that Goethe had no doubt at all that Balsamo and Cagliostro were the same) and with the true Teutonic thoroughness, investigated the whole background of the

Count, pursuing his enquiry even to the extent of visiting the scenes of Balsamo's childhood, not excluding his own household. According to Goethe's story, Giuseppe, calling himself the Marchese Pellegrini, conceived the idea of visiting once more his native Palermo. One can understand a nostalgia so profound as to overcome the warnings of prudence, if indeed (which seems unlikely) such warnings ever came to Balsamo to disturb his confidence and hinder his plans. On the way Lorenza, now *soi-disante* Marchesa, picked up a prince. The Balsamos were flying high, but their ambitiousness had its own reward, and they were immediately, to use a modern phrase, in the money. The Marquess himself had his own carriage and valet; a Neapolitan barber, who learnt so well the lessons that his employer imparted—no doubt as he was shaving the Marquess—that, on leaving Giuseppe's employ, he set up in business on his own as a charlatan. What a charming party it must have been! The Marquess with his valet, the Marchioness with her Prince, and enough money to see them all as happy as grigs! Never had Fortune's smile seemed so bland; and, indeed, so secure did Balsamo feel in the continuance of his good luck, that there came upon him that wistful desire for permanence which attacks all old panders who feel that the time has come to retire from an exciting but strenuous game. Sentimental, as only the truly immoral can be, he looked around Palermo for a house suitable to his social standing. He found one, on the outskirts; a charming square-built place; pink-washed, and bowered in lime and cypress. Alas for the vanity of all human hopes! Alas too for over-confidence and a lack of remembrance! Marano was

alive; his memory sharpened by the thought of the humiliation that Giuseppe had put upon him. *He* did not fail, despite the passage of the years, to recognise in this plump, polished, and prosperous Marquess, the little corner-boy who had diddled him so neatly and so shamefully. Warrants are easy enough to obtain in those unhappy countries who do not know the benefits of the Anglo-Saxon code, and Marano had no difficulty in obtaining one. Soon the most illustrious Marquess was cooling his heels in the local lock-up.

Still, it is always wise to choose one's friends, less with a view to what one can do for them, than to what they can do for you. The wisdom of this was made immediately apparent to Balsamo when Lorenza ran screaming to her Prince, imploring him to get her darling husband out of gaol. Goethe describes the incident with considerable gusto, nor yet without, it must be admitted, a strong admiration for Cagliostro showing in every phrase of his narrative. 'The manner of his escape,' he says, 'deserves to be described'. It does indeed!

The Prince was a man of exalted birth; son to one of the chief of the great Sicilian landowners. He himself had held high office under the Neapolitan crown, and he was a person, says Goethe, who united with a strong body and ungovernable temper, all the tyrannical caprice that the rich and great, without culture, consider themselves entitled to exhibit.

"Donna Lorenza had contrived to gain this man, and on him the fictitious Marchese Pellegrini founded his security. The Prince had testified openly that he was the protector of this strange pair, and his fury may be imagined when Giuseppe Balsamo, at the instance of the man he had cheated, was cast into prison. The Prince tried various means to deliver him, and as these

were of no avail, he publicly, in the President's Antechamber, threatened Marano's lawyer with the direst misusage if the suit were not dropped and Balsamo immediately set at liberty. As the lawyer declined to accede to such a proposal, the Prince grasped the attorney, beat him, threw him on to the ground, trampled him with his feet, and could hardly be restrained from still grosser outrages, when the President himself came on to the scene of the tumult and ordered that the peace be restored.

"The President, a weak man without independence of soul, made no attempt to punish the aggressor; Marano and his lawyer lost heart; and Balsamo was set free. There was not " (says Goethe) "so much as a registration in the Court Journal specifying his dismissal; *who occasioned it, or how it took place.*"

Goethe adds that the Marquess immediately afterwards left Palermo, undertaking various journeys; of the details of which, the German adds, he could obtain no clear information.

This part of Balsamo's life is, I admit, somewhat unannotated. I think that Mr. Trowbridge is right when he pours scorn on the ease with which Theveneau de Morande fills in this gap in the history, nor do I think it wise to consider in detail Morande's story of how Balsamo induced Lorenza's hitherto honest family to join him and his wife in a gang of plunderers. The whole character of Balsamo would make such a proceeding unlikely, to say the least of it; Balsamo to all intents and purposes being a lone wolf.<sup>1</sup> Nor do the other stories that Morande has to tell bear the stamp of truth, and I propose therefore to skip this dubious portion of the narrative, and take our hero and heroine a stage further in their adventurous career.

<sup>1</sup> That is to say, so far as his family was concerned.



## IX

THOSE of my readers who have passed down that narrow thoroughfare which runs between Pall Mall and Leicester Square, and which bears the name of Whitcomb Street, will no doubt be familiar with the furniture repository of Messrs. Hampton. This repository is bounded on the south by Pall Mall and on the north by a little street called St. Martin's Street, in which once Dr. Burney lived, and in which Messrs. Macmillan now have their imposing place of business; and which place of business once covered the Royal Tennis Court. The observant traveller through Whitcomb Street may have noticed the upper portion of that part of the repository which abuts on St. Martin's Street; a red brick façade, with the fenestration in the manner of the late seventeenth century; curved-topped sash windows with the heavy astragals typical of that period which is commonly called Queen Anne, but which, in reality, belongs to an earlier time. This façade of mellow red brick is one of the last of the old houses of Whitcomb Street, and from it we may gain some small idea of the appearance the street presented in the July of 1776, when the Count and Countess Cagliostro took up their lodgings there. That year was a fateful one for England. It was to see England's American colonies break away from the mother country, and establish their own independence. But we may imagine the Count was concerned with more personal

troubles when he hired lodgings for himself and the ravishing Seraphina. England has always been, as befits the home of so inquisitive a people, the land in which the book of reference flourishes. Are you so minded, you may find out, in the proper places, which houses lie along certain streets, and the names and occupations of those people who live in them. Our noble families, and even those less noble, are registered as exhaustively as are the pedigrees of Arabian blood-stock. Every honour or distinction that a man merits in England; every profession that he selects for himself; every deed that he does, good or bad; fixes him the more strongly in the public records. One would say, then, that England was the last place to which the poseur would come, seeing how readily available are the proofs of his fraud. Alas! paradoxical as it may seem, the rogue who trades upon an assumed name or on pretensions to exalted rank, never flourished as he has flourished in England. The files of the newspapers are full of references to Lord This and Lord That, whose patents of nobility were derived from no earthly prince. Perhaps it is that the English are so sure that no fraud could ever be successfully perpetrated, seeing that it were so readily exposable, that they assume that no man would ever seek to bamboozle a people so well provided with arms against the swindler.

The Londoner of the eighteenth-century was as credulous as his counterpart of the twentieth; as easily taken in, as charmed to be associated with persons of rank. Thomas Moore was not the only one who dearly loved a lord; for the same may be said of the Count's landlady. She told her friends, with considerable satisfaction, of the arrival of her two

distinguished guests: the handsome Count and the beautiful Countess; upon the physical beauty of which two the good woman must have held forth at some length, seeing that, owing to the Count's imperfect mastery of the English tongue, he had been able to do little more than explain that he and his wife were latterly arrived from Portugal.<sup>1</sup> However, even without pumping her visitors, the landlady found enough in their personal habits to provide her with gossip. The Countess, besides being a woman of considerable beauty and charm, appeared also to be rich. Her jewels were numerous and of good quality, from which fact we may infer that the journey 'from Portugal' had not been unprofitable for the two pilgrims. The Count had arranged that one of the rooms of his apartments be cleared of its furniture, so that he could have it fitted up as a chemical laboratory. The landlady, naturally, did not inform her friends of the precise nature of the Count's experiments; neither, for the matter of that, can the writer. The cynic might insist that the Count could do no more.

(Back we come to Mr. Trowbridge and his objection to the assumption that Cagliostro and Balsamo were the same. Surely, in this fitting up a chemical laboratory we may perceive yet one more point of similarity between the two men? I will not labour this point, but call the reader's attention to it.)

The Count and the Countess could speak little English; it was therefore inevitable that the landlady, no doubt in order to familiarise herself with her distinguished guests' wants, should suggest that a teacher of languages be called upon to improve the

<sup>1</sup> There is possibly a clue here to the fact that Cagliostro was endeavouring to conceal his previous visit to England.

couple's command of English. It so happened that in the same house lodged a certain Madame Blevary, who, in spite of her French name, would appear to have been a native of that country from which the Count and Countess had latterly come. Madame Blevary was a Portuguese lady, and the Countess welcomed the suggestion, made by her landlady, that Madame Blevary should become her companion-interpreter.

Earlier in this book, I remarked upon a singular fact: that Cagliostro seemed to have had the capacity to be deceived by the very same tricks with which he imposed on others. In reading what follows, let it not be forgotten that Cagliostro was a foreigner with but a meagre command of English, and thus necessarily deprived of that fluency of speech upon which his success had been raised. One understands, of course, that even the most silver-tongued scoundrel must be at a loss when among a people whose language he speaks imperfectly. Thus, Cagliostro's reputation must not suffer because, on his coming to Whitcomb Street, he came a pigeon to be plucked, who before had so notably done the plucking.

Madame Blevary was not without friends; among them a Signor Vitellini, who, a compatriot, we may judge, of the Count's, was of that profession into which all impecunious foreigners seem eventually to drift. Signor Vitellini had been, it is said, a member of the Society of Jesus, which membership must reflect some credit upon his academic attainments, while his expulsion from that Society must equally reflect some odium upon his moral sense. The Signor, reduced now to penury, sought to earn a modest livelihood in the imparting instruction in those

languages of which he had the command. Who better than Vitellini to teach the Count the language Milton spake, while Madame Blevary was discharging the same agreeable office for the Countess? Signor Vitellini got the job.

There were other things, too, besides a common nationality, which made a bond between pupil and master. Vitellini, it appears, was an amateur of chemistry, and it is said that it was his learning that the Count had fitted up his laboratory which induced Vitellini in the first place to seek an introduction.

## X

EASY come, easy go is an old proverb which has, as readers will appreciate, but a limited application. It is not always your man to whom money comes easily who is lavish in its distribution; but with the Count the phrase was certainly applicable. Both Alessandro and his Countess were persons of a most generous disposition, seeming to set as little store by the money that they dispersed as by the money which so easily and so plentifully came into their hands. It will therefore cause the reader no surprise to discover that Vitellini soon became loud in praise of the Count's generosity, good breeding, and learning; but most, his generosity. I have no information available on the question of whether the numerous pubs of Whitcomb Street be the direct descendants of the pubs of Vitellini's day<sup>1</sup>, but one may rest assured that the London of 1776 was even more liberally endowed with these places of refreshment than is the London of our own time, and that the presence of such places provided Vitellini—now rescued (almost, it would seem, by the direct intervention of that providence in whom he had ceased to believe) from poverty—with adequate means of advertising the Count's good qualities. It is said, too, that among those talents with which the grateful linguist credited his patron was the ability to transmute

<sup>1</sup> The *Hand and Racquet*, at the corner of Orange Street and Whitcomb Street, certainly is

the baser metals into the precious. May the reader wonder, then, that soon the salon of the Count and Countess was thronged with an eager crowd of the impecunious; all of them determined, and making no secret of their determination, to share in the good fortune which had befallen Vitellini and Madame Blevary? My own experience has shown me that such parasites are disinclined to burden themselves with any conscientious objections to plunder; but assuming that such scruples may have come to disturb the complacency of any of these visitors to Cagliostro's house, surely it is easy to understand that those scruples must soon have been quieted by the reflection that no money could be considered improperly taken which was taken from a man who had mastered the secret of fabricating wealth to any extent he chose. But even the generosity of the Count was unequal to the strain that these friends of his new-found friends imposed upon it; it was not long before the burden of the hospitality that he was forced to accord proved too great for his resources, and he was, although reluctantly, compelled to show them the door. Among the people thus ejected was that same Pergolesi (or Pergolezzi), with whom, it will be remembered, Balsamo had formerly secured employment. This is a small point, and one to which I myself do not propose to attach too great an importance, seeing that it is not improbable that all members of the Italian colony of that day most likely would make each other's acquaintance; but it is not to be ignored that the Pergolesi who had employed Balsamo did come to Cagliostro's rooms. Signor Pergolesi took his ejection in very bad part. He was hurt; he was angry; he was outraged. His hot Latin blood simmered up to

boiling point, and he marched around London threatening "to blast the reputation of the Count by circulating a report throughout London that he was ignorant and necessitous, of obscure birth, and had once before resided in England". A curious threat, if Cagliostro and Balsamo were not the same! Apparently, Pergolesi, at any rate, must have thought that they were.

In this general clearing-out poor Vitellini suffered. Too late he regretted his indiscretion; with his friends he had to go. Of all their new acquaintances, the Count and Countess permitted only Madame Blevary to remain on terms of intimacy with them.

It had been better, one is forced to conclude, that Vitellini had remained, and Madame Blevary been shown the door, for like those rooms in the Gospel out of which the devils were swept, into the Count's apartments an even more pernicious gang came to take up residence. The cupidity of Madame Blevary was now thoroughly aroused, whether by the sight of the Countess's jewels or by Vitellini's tales of the Count's alchemical talent, it is impossible to say. Both things probably contributed in an equal degree. At any rate, she determined to plunder of the Count what was to be had. To this end she introduced to the Count and Countess a certain Lord and Lady Scot, whose title would have been as hard to find in British books of reference as would have been the Count's in their continental counterpart. We may imagine that Lord and Lady Scot entertained not the least doubt of the genuineness of the distinguished foreigners' title; we know that the Count and Countess were perfectly satisfied that in their new friends they had met with two of the most notable ornaments of



the Scottish peerage. This introduction was apparently effected without the personal ministration of Madame Blevary herself. Some trifling illness had caused her to take to her bed, and Lord Scot was introduced to the Count through the medium of a letter that Madame wrote, in which she said that "Lord Scot, of whom she had often spoken to him, had arrived in town, and proposed to himself the honour of introduction that afternoon".

His Lordship arrived, presenting an appearance not entirely conformable to those ideas that Cagliostro had entertained concerning the deportment of a Scottish nobleman; but Cagliostro would seem to have rejected any unworthy suspicions of his visitor's credentials with the reflection that they did things differently in Scotland. Alas! they did things exactly the same, and the first material result of Scot's meeting with the Count was the putting a sum of £12 into the former's pocket. This sum, in Portuguese currency, belonging to the Count, the Scottish nobleman undertook to get converted into English coin at a local money-changer's. Cagliostro never saw again either the Portuguese money or its English equivalent, for the Scotsman had had the misfortune, so he declared, to put the money into a pocket in which there was a hole, so that, naturally enough, the money had fallen out. It really takes a crook to swallow such a story; but Cagliostro swallowed it. And when Scot, confessing that his income was something far less important than his title, admitted his inability to make good the loss, Cagliostro sought to soothe his friend's mortification by an invitation to dinner.

That spontaneous kindness was the Count's undoing.

Along came Scot, and, with him, Lady Scot, who soon undertook those companionable duties now no longer possible to be discharged by the invalid Madame Blevary. Soon—too soon!—Lady Scot had borrowed £200 from Seraphina on what our modern Scottish dwellers in Sackville Street call a ‘simple note of hand’.

## XI

WHAT follows now must be regarded as the worst period of the Count's life, if we except those last dreadful years in the Fortress of San Leo, when the Holy Inquisition was showing an atheist what he had missed by abjuring the faith of the God of Love and Mercy. The Scots dug themselves in with the ineradicability, determination, and directness-of-approach of borer-worms. As so often happens in life, whose whole purpose seems to be to teach us the folly of all generous actions, the Cagliostros were faced with the prospect of living their lives with double their household. Lord and Lady Scot were not always there, of course; his Lordship being a man of affairs, and the pubs, then as now, being only too plentiful in Whitcomb Street. Besides, his Lordship was now provided with his entrance-money, and not only that: the generous Count provided him with his mobility too. On the other hand, there were periods when one might be certain always of finding Lord and Lady Scot at the Cagliostros'. These were meal times. A ring at the door; a head poked round the corner; well-bred surprise and a discreetly expressed mortification that the visit should so unfortunately coincide with the hour of the meal. . . . Apologies; offers to come at another time; offers not hard to be refused; and all four sitting down at a meal which, one must imagine, was not deficient in food for the extra guests. As boatmen like occasionally to be

taken for a row, so is it not improbable that the Count was not the dupe that he seemed when he entertained, twice daily, his Scottish friends. I cannot believe that he was altogether ignorant of the true character of Lord and Lady Scot, and I would rather believe that he consciously permitted himself to be plundered, partly for the sake of gratifying his undoubtedly kindly instincts, and partly because of the perverse pleasure that it must have given him to view the whole scene objectively, and see himself in that position in which had been too many others whom he had known. However, this is but speculation; what we do know is this: that the impulse to accept Lord and Lady Scot as their friends, to whatever motive the impulse be referable, was fraught with the direst possibilities for the Count and Countess. The Old Man of the Sea was a somewhat neglectful friend by comparison with the Scots. They clung with the devitalising tenacity of the bind-weed. Nothing could shake them off; hints were useless; what hours the Cagliostros kept suited quite well the Scots' own convenience; did the Countess wish to go shopping, it was always convenient; nay, more, it was a pleasure for Lady Scot to accompany her and to give the Countess advice.

One wishes that one might know some details of the conversations which were carried on about the Count's table. Did Lord Scot and the Count vie in impressing each other? or did they, as I cannot help suspecting, soon admit to a fraternity of occupation and a community of interests? I cannot see otherwise how the friendship between the polished Count and the uncouth Lord could have subsisted as long as it did.

We shall never know what were the subjects of their conversations; we may only guess at them—although guess with reasonable accuracy—from a consideration of the characters of the quartet. We do know, however, that Cagliostro, in the course of idle talk, remembered a curious aid that he had once found towards the prediction of winning lottery numbers. It will be recollected by the reader that the lottery was as important then among English people as it is today among French. Waterloo Bridge was built upon the profits of a State Lottery conducted for that purpose, and the lottery was a most important feature of the state economy of the eighteenth-century. What more natural, then, that the talk should have turned upon this Government-sponsored gambling? One can imagine how Lord Scot's ears must have pricked when his noble friend confessed to him that he had a manuscript which contained "many curious cabalistic operations, by aid of which the author set forth the possibilities of calculating winning numbers". We do not wish to be led astray by any too imaginative surmise; it would be wiser, therefore, to record without comment the fact that Cagliostro himself seems to have been nothing of a gambler, at least so far as the lottery was concerned. Lord Scot, however, with the superstitious hopefulness of his kind, was not going to be persuaded, by the Count's affected contempt for this cabalistic document, to be put off a chance of making himself wealthy. How much persuasion was necessary before Scot overcame the Count's reluctance to advise him on his prospects of winning, we do not know. All we do know is that the Count consulted his book, and gave Scot a certain number that his search had yielded. Scot, no doubt

scraping together all the money upon which he might lay his hands, ventured a few pounds, and, to his delight—though one suspects not greatly to his surprise—won more than a hundred pounds. We need not be of any great acuity of perception to be able to realise exactly what Alessandro had let himself in for. It was useless to tell the grasping Scot that his win was merely a piece of good luck. Scot, reasonably enough, was now convinced that the Count possessed, in this invaluable manuscript of his, the certain means by which all the long years of privation and denial might be ended. One may imagine how Lord Scot pestered the Count, and having seen myself a similar system to that which the Count used; having, indeed, in my youth, experimented, not without some success, in the predicting the results of horse races; I know something of the difficulties with which the experimenter is faced. Assuming that the Count employed some sort of numerological system, it would necessitate a considerable amount of mathematical calculation in order to produce any result, correct or otherwise. We know that the Count, at this time, was devoting much labour to his alchemical experiments, and therefore the simple, and obvious, answer to the question, Why did the Count decline to assist Scot further? must be that he had not the desire to waste time which had been better spent in seeking the Elixir of Life or the Grand Alkahest. But Scot, with the persistency both of a Scotsman and of a man who suddenly sees the prospect of all his troubles ending, gave Alessandro no peace. Exasperated to the point of frenzy by what he considered Cagliostro's appalling meanness in refusing him the right to riches, Scot might no longer sustain

the sorry pretence to nobility; rent with the internal fires, his body shuddered, and the thin veneer of culture cracked and flaked and pulverised. The cheap rogue was now laid bare for the eyes of even a foreigner to see, and Cagliostro's natural reaction to this revelation—one wonders how it had been so long hidden!—was to refuse Lord and Lady Scot his house. Alas! how much better it had been for Alessandro had he given Scot his number and let the fool waste what little was left to him. Instead, by refusing to give a number, Cagliostro exposed himself to all the malicious enmity of which the mean-souled trickster was capable.

Lord Scot accepted his congé, and decided to use his wife—in reality a Miss Fry—in order to secure himself readmission to the Count's good graces. Off went Miss Fry to the Countess, armed with tears and that tale that most of us have heard, and which concerns the infidelity of the husband and the pitiful plight of the three kiddies left hungry and howling, and wondering what the hell Daddy has done with the hundred quid? Seraphina shared with her husband the quality of tender-heartedness. Miss Fry's elaborate account of her home life did not fail to have its desired effect, and the Countess, moved to compassion by the woman's obvious distress, gave her a guinea, and—which was even more welcome—a number for the lottery. How delighted Miss Fry must have been with her present; how quickly she must have hurried home to her lordly husband to tell him that fate had smiled on them again! And it did smile! Every penny that they could beg or borrow, the Scots staked upon the chance. When, upon the result of the lottery being declared, they found that they

had won fifteen hundred guineas, they must have determined that Alessandro could on no account be permitted to free himself from their acquaintance. The confidence that they now felt in Cagliostro's ability to foretell so profitably the future is strikingly demonstrated by the nature of Miss Fry's next act. With her fifteen hundred guineas intact, she hurried along to Whitcomb Street, and offered the whole of it in gratitude to Seraphina. One wonders how she explained her neglect of her three starving children! But the Count, correctly suspecting a trap, refused both the money and her protestations of friendship. He had not agreed with Seraphina's having encouraged the woman further, and now he made it quite clear that he wished to terminate an acquaintanceship that he now regretted having commenced. There is nothing of the Palermo slums now in the Count's manner. His words to Miss Fry upon this occasion have a natural dignity in completest accord with that rank to which he pretended.

"If you will take my advice, you will go into the country with your three children, and live on the interest of your money. If I have obliged you, the only return I desire is that you will never more re-enter my doors."

Vain hope! Did the Count really believe that so striking a proof of his prophetic gift would not bind the Scots more closely to him than was Sindbad bound to the Old Man of the Sea? Fifteen hundred guineas! Why, that was a flea-bite compared with the great feast which was to follow; and the Scots were not letting this Purse of Fortunatus slip from their grasp without making the strongest efforts to retain their hold upon it. Madame Blevary seems



to have faded out of the picture, so that it is Vitellini whom we find now employed in the role of intermediary. That he himself, after having listened to Lady Scot's account of the several interviews between herself and the Cagliostros, entertained some reluctance to become the Scots' Mercury, would seem to be indicated by his gift of twenty guineas out of the Scots' winnings. And that the Scots attached enough importance to Vitellini's embassy, is equally well shown by the fact that they did not begrudge twenty guineas in order to induce him to undertake it. Vitellini, however, did not succeed where Miss Fry had failed, and he was forced to return to her with a confession of ill-success. Miss Fry, in her disappointment, turned as nasty as lay in the power of her none-too-sweet nature to be. She considered that Vitellini had swindled her of her twenty guineas, and she had him arrested for debt and clapped into gaol. Charming woman! And now what? For the reader will not believe that Miss Fry accepted this rebuff save as a spur to still greater endeavour. She and her lord put their criminal heads together, and decided that if the Count might not be argued into granting them their wish, then he must be forced. To this end they devised a scheme not without its artistic merit, considered purely as a piece of swindling.

Remember that the profit, so far, from the Scots' gambling was in the neighbourhood of £1,700; a sum, we may imagine, far in excess of any previous earnings. There was much at stake, then, when they decided to risk £100 (or the winnings on the first gambling venture) on securing for themselves an 'Open sesame!' to wealth, in the shape of the Count's cabalistical document.

## XII

THE first thing that the Scots did, in pursuance of their scheme, was to order a cabinet-maker to prepare a box with a double compartment. It would appear, from what follows after, that there was no great secret about this box,<sup>1</sup> but that the double division was not at first sight apparent. Failing sight of the box itself, or an accurate description of it, we may assume that it was, in all probability, constructed after a common eighteenth-century pattern; the side of the box lifting in order to reveal a drawer which runs between the space of the bottom. The eighteenth-century cabinet-maker delighted in these tricks, which, although *secrets de polichinelle*, yet gave him the opportunity to display the ingenuity of his craftsmanship. At any rate, however the box was constructed, it was made in such a way that it allowed Miss Fry to put into the less obvious cavity a diamond necklace that she had found at a pawnbroker's, and for which she had paid ninety-four pounds. In the more obvious receptacle, Miss Fry put a quantity of costly snuff, which may, however, be a misprint for *stuff*. I know that the Italians of the eighteenth-century had some odd habits, but somehow I find incongruous the idea of that delicate Roman nose of Seraphina's twitching in the delights of a good thumb of rappee.

All this, though, is beside the point. The fact is,

<sup>1</sup> Some say that it was a trinket-box. I think this unlikely.

that Miss Fry, with protestations of love and repentance, induced the Countess to accept the box. The Countess, whose kindness of heart seems always to have prevented her from rebuffing anyone, even criminals the most shameless, accepted the present, not knowing, of course, that the box contained anything more valuable than the snuff with which it seemed to have been filled. Two or three days later, the 'secret' compartment was discovered, and, with its existence, that of the necklace. The Count had expressly forbidden the taking anything from Miss Fry, and to him therefore came the Countess, to ask what should be done with this delightful gift? The Count ordered its immediate return, but there were so many arguments with which the Countess might have pleaded to be allowed to retain it, that we do not need to examine too closely those arguments. It would appear indelicate were they to send it back, or it was but a small recompense for all that they had done for the Scots. . . . There were a dozen things that she might have said; possibly, she said all the dozen.

The Count must have been very much in love with his Seraphina, for she seems to have been able to cloud in a disastrous fashion his otherwise only-too-clear perception. Thus, he permitted himself to be persuaded that, in the allowing his wife to retain possession of the necklace, there was not for him the seeds of a terrible disaster. Those persons who delight in the detecting coincidences, may ponder on the fact that the two worst periods of Cagliostro's life owed their inception to the fact of a necklace.

Reluctantly, Alessandro gave permission for Miss Fry to call on his wife. He did not want to have more to do with her, but even he had hardly dared

to refuse the house to one whose gift he had permitted his wife to retain. Miss Fry made the most of her opportunities. Outwardly she was penitent, grateful, and only too obviously eager to reinstate herself in the good graces of her noble friends. Possibly, Seraphina had pleaded for her on the grounds that she herself was lonely, seeing that so much of the Count's time was now taken up in his laboratory. We may be sure that Miss Fry made good use of those hours in which the Count left her alone with Seraphina.

In spite of the snubs that the Count administered to the woman for whom he felt not only the dislike that one feels for those who have wronged us, but also the contempt that one feels for exposed fraud, Miss Fry, with the pertinacity of her sort, continued to call on Seraphina, ignoring the snubs and concentrating all her mental powers on the attaining her one dear object. Thus, when the Cagliostros moved around the corner into Suffolk Place, Miss Fry followed them; now taking a room in the same house; so that it became impossible for them to avoid seeing her every day. Her attentions, indeed, became so embarrassing, that the Count, after having endured far beyond the limits of his natural patience, enquired of her how much longer she proposed to leave her three motherless children in the country? Only so long, the artful creature replied, as the Count declined to help her out of her financial difficulty! Why, had the seventeen hundred pounds gone so quickly? Ah, but the Count must remember that there had been lean years before, in which Lord and Lady Scot had rendered themselves, out of very necessity, indebted to a number of people; and these creditors

had had to be satisfied. But, since the Count had, with the delicacy of a true gentleman, inquired as to her future, she felt encouraged to tell him her troubles. We may imagine the consternation with which Alessandro realised, too late, what he had let himself in for. Miss Fry explained that her difficulty might be resolved very simply: by the Count's giving her the winning number in the next French lottery.

Never! said the Count. He didn't believe in his own powers of prediction—what had happened before was the result of pure chance—and he wasn't going to encourage Miss Fry in what he considered to be a waste of time and money. All that he would do, in order to rid himself of this importunate person, was to give her fifty pounds and pay her coach fare to that part of the country in which lived her three imaginary children.

Miss Fry, naturally, took her fifty pounds. Who wouldn't? But fifty pounds was not what she wanted; only with the greatest restraint had she concealed her opinion of a gift almost insulting in its inadequacy. What was fifty pounds when the Count possessed the secret by which he had been enabled to give her five, or fifty, or five hundred thousand, even? Miss Fry, pondering the matter, began to feel herself very badly used, and to conceive for the Count those feelings inspired in even the most forgiving of us by the wanton oppression of the ill-willed.

She knew what she wanted, and what she wanted were her rights. She took her fifty pounds, and the next day she crossed the corridor which separated her apartment from that of the Count, and renewed her demands for money. Yes, she was grateful for the fifty pounds, and that had gone off *to feed her*

*children.* This new money that she required was for the settlement of some debts which had been forgotten when she had last spoken to the Count.

The Count had now reached the end of what the unbiased historian must concede to have been an exemplary patience. He was not either a very rich man or a very foolish one, and we may understand that what forgiveness and generosity he had accorded Miss Fry had been given mostly on the representations of that wife whom—we must admit it—he loved. But now this woman was doing more than annoy him with her clumsy lies and vulgar pretensions ; she was offending his self-esteem, because she did not seem to realise what were his motives for helping her. Even your easy-going Italian can be a most formidable person when inspired by the consciousness of right, and that last interview between Miss Fry and her benefactor may well have been the stormiest in her career. The Count showed her the door; this time explaining, without mincing his words, that in no circumstances would she be permitted to visit his house again.

### XIII

FULLY to appreciate what follows, the reader must bear in mind that the laws of England at the end of the eighteenth-century were different far from what they are today. The mass of rules and regulations governing the conduct of the English people had so multiplied in the course of six centuries, that English judges, despairing of ever being able to master the magnitude and complexity of the English penal code, relied more and more on that privilege, that the English system accords to its guardians, of interpreting the law as seems to them proper to the occasion. Already Coke had been dead a century and more, while Blackstone's labours had hardly begun to nibble at the vast bulk of anachronistic and obsolete usage. It was no better in France, of course, which was still awaiting a Napoleon in order to codify her laws; in fact, the legal systems of the world were hopelessly out of date, and quite inadequate to deal with conditions which had changed far beyond the concepts of those who had originally framed the laws. The great weakness of the English legal system has always rested in its allowing the judiciary to interpret the law, thereby admitting the validity of that barbarism known as Case Law, which is, of course, no more than the prejudice of the Bench. Where the defendant is to be judged rather by the personal sentiments of the magistrate than by his own relation to an unalterable code, abuse must

inevitably creep in. When, in addition, the very laws themselves are so little understood that no judge may hope to unravel their complexities, the situation becomes such that a man must rely only on the dexterity of his attorney, and never on the intrinsic justice of his case.

This was the position in England at the end of the eighteenth-century. It was to such a legal discipline that Miss Fry and her paramour looked for assistance when they decided that Cagliostro must be forced to disgorge that which he had not willingly given up.

Their first act, after Lady Scot's eviction from the Count's flat, was to swear a debt of two hundred pounds against the Count. According to the usage of the time, the debtor was under the obligation of proving himself innocent of the liability, and a warrant for his arrest might be obtained by any malicious-minded person simply in attesting the debt before a magistrate. The course then followed by the law provided for the arrest of the debtor and his incarceration in a sponging-house, from which the debtor might be released only by his paying the debt *plus* the costs of his detention, or proving perjury on the part of his prosecutor. No one was exempt from the dangers of this unjust legal process. Only a few years before the Cagliostros came to England the King of Corsica had died in a London debtor's prison, and the list of those who have languished in these unhappy places contains the names of many who have been famous as writers, artists, soldiers and statesmen.

Associated with Miss Fry in her despicable manoeuvre were three men: her husband, of course; a tough named Broad, and a shady lawyer named



Reynolds, who "not withstanding his expertness in the pettifogging finesse of the low law, could not preserve himself from an ignominious exhibition in the pillory". Reynolds himself arranged the bringing of the action, and he himself served the writ, apparently without having secured a warrant from the magistrate. He took himself and the Sheriff's officers around to Suffolk Place, and there confronted the astonished Count with an order of imprisonment. In vain did Alessandro protest his complete ignorance of the charge. Reynolds merely grinned, and told him, with the gutter impudence which has always been the prerogative of the attorney, that he would have ample opportunity to state his case in Court. The Sheriff's officers, accompanied by Reynolds, took the wretched Count off to the sponging-house, and Scot and Broad, who had been left in possession of the now untenanted flat, took the opportunity to break open bureaux and cupboards and drawers, searching for the precious manuscript which was to make all their fortunes. They found it, but one imagines that their faith in it was not altogether perfect, for having come across, in the course of their search, Miss Fry's note of hand for two hundred pounds, they prudently destroyed this. They were assisted in their search by Miss Fry, who had had the good sense to wait on the stairs while the writ was being served on the Count. History does not tell us where was the Countess during these alarming occurrences, but it is probable that it was she who secured, the next day, her husband's release, by depositing with the Sheriff's officer, one Saunders, several hundred pounds' worth of jewellery.

The Count returned to a house sadly plundered, but the violent action to which the conspirators had

had recourse had not freed the Count from their criminal attentions. The Count, in his relief at having escaped the terrors of imprisonment, possibly accounted himself lucky that he had been robbed of so little: a note of hand which would never have been worth more than the paper on which it was written; a manuscript by which he himself set little store; and a quantity of jewellery not in itself irreplaceable.

But the crooks had not done with Alessandro, whose prophetic gift did not warn him to pack his traps there and then, and leave the country. One may imagine the four of them sitting about a table in a coffee house, poring over the unintelligible pages of the Count's manuscript, and one does not need any great imaginativeness in order to comprehend the fury with which they came to the conclusion that their precipitate action had availed them nothing but the jewels that Saunders, no doubt, allowed them to share.

Among the many hundreds of unrepealed ordinances which cluttered up the English law of that time was one relating to the practice of witchcraft. Such anachronistic ordinances still exist in English law, nor may we look forward yet to a time when they shall cease to disfigure our legal system, for they provide the means by which the unscrupulous ruler may institute proceedings against an enemy not easily apprehensible on more orthodox charges. The value to the criminal of these discreetly overlooked laws is readily discerned in the use that Reynolds made of the unrepealed Statute against wizards. He secured a fresh warrant for Cagliostro's arrest. It must not be supposed that Reynolds, who so well understood the advantages to the plaintiff available

in the English legal system, thought for one moment that such a charge might be sustained, but, as I said before, the law at that time favoured, as does the present-day code in France, the plaintiff. The defendant was adjudged guilty until he had demonstrated, to the satisfaction of judge and jury, his complete innocence of the charge brought against him.

However, despite his imperfect understanding of the English tongue, the Count would seem to have possessed an eloquence and charm of so high a quality that they transcended the petty limitations of the spoken word. Once again he managed to persuade his gaolers to release him, though not, one suspects, without having added some material argument in the shape of a bribe. He returned home, and now, understanding that the Count was no weak-minded fool to submit to this species of petty persecution, the conspirators resolved on a change of tactics. The iron hand was wrapped in the velvet glove, and Reynolds, dropping his menacing tones for honey-smooth persuasion, called on the Count with the mild request that Alessandro explain to the holders of his manuscript the principles by which the interpretation might be effected. The Count did not see eye-to-eye with this amiable proposition. He professed himself willing, in order to rid himself of the Scots, to forget the note-of-hand which had been taken, but he demanded that the manuscript be returned to him. Reynolds perceived that his request was being refused, and that the time had now come for the next part of the scheme to be enacted.

While Reynolds was speaking to the Count, the odious Scot was crouching outside the door, his large, vulgar ears glued to the big eighteenth-century

keyhole. Scot, listening to the interchange of plea and denial, realised, with Reynolds, that the Count was not to be persuaded. With this realisation, he sprang to his feet, threw open the door, and rushed, with loud, menacing cries, into the room. Before the astonished Count might enquire the reason for this unmannerly intrusion, Scot had seized him by his cravat and presented a cocked horse-pistol at his breast.

Certain consciousness of the inevitable brings with it its own courage, for fear is only another name for hope, and doubtless Cagliostro, faced with the undeniable prospect of death, must have felt that even death itself had been a lesser tragedy than a life rendered hateful by the greed of low creatures. He explained to Scot that the pistol could not cause him to alter his mind, and that he suggested, the sorry comedy having failed in its object, that the actors should pack up.

Both Reynolds and Scot appear to have been much impressed by the fortitude shown by their victim. They agreed—one may judge not insincerely—to go with the Count to Saunders, the bailiff, at whose house the manuscript had been lodged, and there to restore the paper to its owner. The three of them set off for the King's Bench Prison, and while one may imagine that there was a certain constraint in their conversation, relief on the one hand and resignation on the other must have contributed to produce at any rate an outward appearance of friendliness. Alas! no sooner had one rogue thrown in his hand, than there was another waiting to try his skill. Saunders, seeing that Scot and Reynolds had abandoned the unequal fight, resolved to make the essay himself to

plunder Alessandro. He asked the Count to remain behind after Scot and Reynolds, now that they had given Cagliostro repossession of his manuscript, had departed. Adopting the attitude of compassionate friend, Saunders advised the Count to bring an action against the villainous quartet. This, he explained, might be done on the grounds that the Count had been swindled, that his house had been illegally entered, and that he himself had been wrongfully arrested. This advice, Alessandro, smarting with a rightful resentment, took; forgetting, no doubt, that Reynolds might still be presumed to be associated with Lord and Lady Scot. For if Cagliostro had forgotten that fact, Miss Fry most certainly had not. She consulted her lawyer friend, and he advised her to remain in London, and to make no attempt to resist arrest, seeing that, the evidence having been destroyed, it would be impossible to prove any criminal act or intention against her. Reynolds, having given her this advice, admitted that against himself, Broad and her lover, such an intention could most definitely be proved, and the three, accordingly, prudently removed themselves from the metropolis. Miss Fry now appears as a woman well armed with the advice of an unscrupulous attorney. On the Count's letting her know that he was about to institute proceedings against her, she coolly reminded him that the two actions that she herself had brought had not yet been disposed of, and she took every means of inspiring in Alessandro a fear of what she might do. Saunders himself professed to be much concerned at the capability for harm of this vindictive woman, and in order to afford Cagliostro protection against her, offered the Count a room in his own

sponging-house. There seem to be conflicting views concerning the reason for the Count's going to live with Saunders. Cagliostro himself recalls the fact that the invitation appeared to him 'singular', but I do not find it singular myself. If Saunders had, as he would appear to have had, the intention to profit by the Count's widely advertised talents, then nothing could be less singular than that the man should wish to have his proposed benefactor as accessible as possible.

The profession of bailiff would seem to have been in the eighteenth-century a more profitable occupation than it is today. Saunders kept his own carriage, and lived in a style which made it no hardship for the Count to transfer his lodgings from Suffolk Place.

"I occupied," he says, "the finest apartment in the house. There was always a seat at my table for a chance comer. I defrayed the expenses of the poor prisoners confined there, and even paid the debts of some, who thus obtained their freedom."

Six weeks after his leaving Suffolk Place, Cagliostro returned to it. Saunders was distressed by his decision to return. Why was this decision made? Had Saunders, too, sought an interpretation of the mysterious document? I think that our knowledge of human nature will not permit us to accept without serious doubt the statement that Reynolds and Company gave up the fight so easily. We know that Saunders, at Reynolds' instance, returned the manuscript to the Count, but may not a copy have been prepared during those days when the document lay in Saunders's house? I see here a more subtle piece of plotting than that which called upon Scot to threaten Alessandro with a pistol. I can imagine that the

conversation in Saunders's house showed too often a perverse inclination to come back, again and again, to that manuscript and the secret that it held.

For consider: no sooner had Cagliostro returned to his own apartment, than Miss Fry served him for the third time with a writ. Not before, mark you, nor some days afterwards, but simultaneously with his return. I cannot believe that he could not indefinitely have delayed the service of that writ by continuing to accept Saunders's hospitality. For Saunders does not drop out of the picture. It is he who advises Cagliostro to accept as his surety, one, Badioli, an Italian merchant. It is also on Saunders's recommendation that Cagliostro engages to defend him an attorney named Priddle, whose acquaintance the Count had made in Saunders's house. In due course the case appeared in the Calendar, and the trial was to be heard in the King's Bench Division before Lord Justice Mansfield. When Priddle saw that Mansfield was to try the case, he threw in his brief, for there were certain things in Mr. Priddle's career which rendered it impossible that he should face this judge. Bereft at the last moment of his counsel, Cagliostro was forced to conduct his own defence, but, as his imperfect knowledge of our tongue made his explanations worse than unintelligible, the judge suggested the employment of an interpreter; and we may see in the presence of Vitellini in the court more proof of the persistency characterising Cagliostro's bandit friends. One may imagine that it was not without considerable misgiving that Cagliostro consented to entrust his affairs to Vitellini's charge, but he was probably persuaded to do so by Vitellini's

reminding him that the linguist himself had suffered at Lady Scot's hands.

But it would appear that, for all his linguistic talent, Vitellini was no more qualified to conduct a defence in an English court-of-law than was Cagliostro himself. He became excited, and with his excitement came confusion, and with confusion came forgetfulness of all tongues but his own. Lord Mansfield, impatient of the gibberish talked by these two excitable foreigners, referred to the charge sheet, and finding there that Cagliostro had been indicted of witchcraft as well as of fraud, decided, quite legitimately, that the case was not important enough to justify any further waste of the Bench's time. He therefore suggested, as the best way to dispose of the affair, that an arbitrator be appointed in order to effect a compromise. Mr. Howarth was appointed as arbitrator.

Mr. Howarth seems to have been an efficient man, untainted with that criminal desire to profit by the law's delays which has too often marred the character of attorneys. He got right down to business, and having decided that Miss Fry might offer no evidence whatever in support of her contention that the Count owed her money, he dismissed her application, and so disposed of the first part of the charge, which related to the £190 that she alleged had been lent to the Count. Mr. Howarth, shining ornament of the Age of Reason, did not even bother to examine the charge of witchcraft. Contemptuously, he declined to hear any evidence on the subject, and dismissed the accusation as 'frivolous'.

Now remained the third charge, that Cagliostro was withholding two hundred pounds belonging to Miss Fry. The evidence advanced by Miss Fry in support of



this contention so nearly amounted to perjury that she put herself and her witness, Broad, in grave danger of imprisonment. Miss Fry and Broad both asserted that the two hundred pounds represented monies which had been expended by them as agents for the Count. Questioned by Mr. Howarth concerning the ways in which these sums had been spent, the two testified that they had, on the Count's instructions, purchased a quantity of 'sequins'. Mr. Howarth pressed Broad to tell him the name of the man who had sold him these sequins. Broad's memory of a sudden grew most lamentably dim. He could not recollect the name of the merchant who had sold them. Mr. Howarth's suspicions were naturally not to be allayed by so equivocal an answer, and he cross-examined poor Broad with all the directness to which the law gives its servants a title. Under this merciless cross-examination, the perjurer grew more and more confused, and his answers less and less convincing. Surely, Mr. Howarth asked, few merchants would have had on hand that large quantity of sequins that one might expect to obtain for £200? Oh, said Broad, he had not bought them of one merchant, but had patronised about eighty. In that case, Howarth remarked, it should not be impossible for Broad to give him the name of at least one? Alas! there was no pelmanism in those days to correct the faults of so weak a recollection, and Miss Fry and her friend suffered the inexpressible mortification of having a verdict given against them. For Miss Fry herself had remembered as little as had her witness. She claimed that such sequins as she had bought, had been brought to her by a Jew of whose name she was ignorant. Mr. Howarth, in dismissing the case with

a severe reprimand, must have felt that he was acting with extraordinary leniency, a conclusion to which the historian is bound to subscribe. But we do not know, of course, what Miss Fry looked like. She was unscrupulous enough to have been extremely attractive, and most probably was.

Miss Fry then made one more effort to establish her credit with the Bench. She claimed that the necklace that had been given to the Countess had been but lent. Mr. Howarth, faced with the necessity to give a verdict, had no option but to give that verdict in favour of Miss Fry. We do not know, considering with what impartiality he had conducted the case, why he should have given Miss Fry the costs. We know that he did; possibly, as I said before, Miss Fry was an attractive woman.

Cagliostro was given time to pay. It is impossible now to know whether the Count had the intention to pay or not to pay. We do know, however, that his surety, Badioli, doubted him extremely. So much so, that Badioli, rather than render himself liable for the costs of the action, resorted to a shabby trick in order to quit himself of all liability. The Count was an Italian, as was Mr. Badioli, so that we may presume that the action Badioli took was determined according to the best principles of the country to which both men belonged. Badioli, realising his indebtedness to the Bench should Cagliostro decamp, invited the Count to take a drive with him through the Park. After the depressing incidents of the preceding days, the Count, one may well understand, consented with willingness; and the two Italians drove through the green pleasaunces, the one unsuspecting and the other unrevealing. After their

drive the carriage pulled up outside a building which was unfamiliar to the Count. Badioli, getting out, indicated to the Count that he should leave the carriage also. Cagliostro and Badioli entered the building together, and having entered it, the two men remained for some minutes in conversation. Then Badioli excused himself, saying that he would be absent but a few minutes, and the Count remained alone to wait for his friend.

"Minutes and hours elapsed, but no Mr. Badioli appeared. The Count then endeavoured to return through the door at which they had entered, but found himself repulsed, though he was ignorant of the cause. He remained till evening in the greatest agitation of mind, roving from place to place, when he attracted the observation of a foreigner, who, having heard his story, and made the necessary enquiries, informed him that he was a prisoner in the King's Bench."

For some reason we do not know, Cagliostro made no attempts to free himself from prison for one full month; or, if such attempts were made, they were unsuccessful. He stayed a month in the King's Bench Prison, and when the Count was released, his deliverance was due to the efforts of a man called O'Reilly.

This brings me back to what I said at the beginning of this book: that Cagliostro was associated with that movement—that revolutionary movement—which was agitating for the alteration of the existing social system in Europe.<sup>1</sup> For O'Reilly was the landlord of a tavern in Gerrard Street called the King's Head, and it was in an upstairs room of the King's Head that the Esperance Lodge of Freemasons were wont

<sup>1</sup> But it has yet to be proven that he was altogether associated with it *in purpose*. I incline to the belief that his reasons for joining the movement were more personal than altruistic.

to gather. One biographer is right when he suggests that O'Reilly was delegated by the members of this Lodge to secure the Count's release. O'Reilly offered to go bail for Alessandro, but unfortunately, seeing that the Courts had risen for the summer vacation, declined to accept surety for the Count's return. Miss Fry professed herself unwilling to accept O'Reilly's bail for her defendant. O'Reilly, however, seems to have been actuated by principles far different from those that the Frys—or Scots—espoused. Realising that his friend, the Count, was to be immured for an indefinite period through the maliciousness of a disappointed woman, he made a personal application to Lord Mansfield, explaining the circumstances of the detention to his Lordship, with the result that Mansfield ordered that the Count be immediately released.

How grateful must Alessandro have felt when O'Reilly told him that he was free to leave the King's Bench Prison. Equally, alas!, how unhappy must the Count have been to realise that even the granting of bail had not sufficed to liberate him from the octopus-clutch of the Scots. For, as the Count, happy in the prospect of freedom, was leaving the prison, a certain Mr. Crisp, the Under-Marshall of the prison, informed him that "one Aylett had lodged a detainer against him by name of Melisa Cagliostro, otherwise Joseph Balsamo, for a debt of £30". Dumbfounded, the Count demanded more specific details of this new charge; he was informed by Crisp that the £30 represented the costs incurred by Aylett himself when, in 1772, he was employed by Dr. Benamore to recover a debt due to the Doctor by Balsamo. There would not seem to have been any

doubt in the minds of Crisp or Aylett that Balsamo and Cagliostro were one and the same ; or, if this seem too decisive a statement, that they would be unable to prove it.

The mental condition of the poor Count at this time may be better imagined than described. He must have felt like Job or Sisyphus or Tantalus, or any other of those figures of mythology who stand as the prototypes of all human suffering. It seemed to him that fate relented of her cruelty only to renew her persecution with redoubled vigour. For, despite his indignant denial that he had never seen Aylett before ; had never heard of him, even ; the Count was unable to save himself from yet another of those deprivations of personal liberty which, under the law of eighteenth-century England, seem to have been almost unavoidable for the suspect.

For what follows we have the word of several witnesses, among which is to be included the Count himself. We may take it therefore that the events that I am about to narrate happened more or less as I shall describe them, but they shed no very favourable light on the Count's reputation for criminal dealing. He figures, indeed, in the events immediately following his meeting with O'Reilly, so little as a criminal that he appears rather to be the sort of fool on which other biographers have represented him as living. I must confess that I find Cagliostro's behaviour in London perfectly inexplicable. I can understand how the Scots plundered him in the first place ; I can understand, too, how he might have been made—a foreigner—the victim of the complexities of the English legal system ; what I cannot understand is this : that having proven to

himself that he was fallen among a nest of vipers, why did he not immediately make his way to a country where he might hope to encounter more considerate treatment? Or is it, as some people have hinted, that he was unable to leave England until certain things had been done which were quite unconnected with the Scots and their friends? And may it not be that in his going to see O'Reilly, and in the fact of O'Reilly's exerting himself in the Count's interest, we may find a clue to the reason for the Count's having come to England, and for his staying there? But I shall examine this point later; in the meanwhile, let us see what happened in the matter of Aylett.

All his life Cagliostro seems to have been betrayed by his own plausibility. The tragedy of such a rogue as was the Count lies, not in the fact that others doubt his boastful utterances, but in the fact that they do not. No one in London seems to have doubted the least of the Count's statements, and most were perfectly prepared to accept his assurances that he had mastered the secret of the transmutation of the base metals. Indeed, there is much to be said in extenuation of the conduct of the Count's bandit friends: when a man may make gold with the facility with which the Government printing-office turns out its bank-notes, why should his friends feel ashamed to take off him a few hundred, easily replaceable, pounds? We know that the Scots and their friends were of the sort who would still have taken those pounds had they been irreplaceable, but human justice will not permit us to pass on without having acknowledged the fact that there were extenuating circumstances that the Scots might plead. Besides, the Scots were but two of a series of persons whose cupidity was excited by

the Count's tales of his own wealth and power. Few with whom the Count came into contact seem to have been unable to resist the desire to use his riches for their own benefit. Now Crisp came to add yet another to that long list. He decided to do a bit of bleeding himself. Thus, when Cagliostro offered him bail in return for permission to leave the sponging-house, Crisp admitted that he could not grant the Count his liberty without having secured Aylett's consent; but he followed this statement up with the suggestion that Cagliostro deposit £30 with him "in order to indemnify Aylett", in which case Crisp would agree to allowing Cagliostro to leave. We may imagine that there was no hesitation on Cagliostro's part in accepting this offer. Unfortunately, though, the Count had not in his pocket-book so great a sum, and the considerate Crisp generously offered to accept as security for that sum an equivalent value in household plate. It was understood that the Count should redeem the plate on the following day, and O'Reilly was accordingly sent to Suffolk Place in order to collect the silver. Seraphina handed over to the messenger "two soup ladles, two candlesticks, two salt cellars, two pepper castors, six forks, six table spoons, nine knife handles with blades, a pair of snuffers and stand, all of silver". It would seem that the Count and his Countess lived in a manner amply conformable to their social pretensions.

Poor Cagliostro! how he must have sighed for those days when Acharat and Althotas sought in their laboratory the Elixir of Life: how far away must have seemed Medina and Palermo and Alexandria and the spacious halls of the Grand Master's Palace! For, when he came next day with his £30 to take the

silver out of pawn, he was met with yet one more example of fate's relentlessness. According to Crisp, Aylett had turned up at the prison soon after the Count had taken his departure, and on learning from Crisp that the Count had been released, Aylett was, so the Under-Marshall affirmed, speechless with fury. He had demanded of Crisp that the silver be handed over to him, and Crisp—thus his story—had no option but to accede to the request. Alas! when Cagliostro sought out Aylett, the man denied having taken Cagliostro's silver, adding that Crisp was a liar. And so, as Cagliostro says, it was impossible for him to ascertain by whom he was plundered. At any rate, whoever had done the plundering, the fact remains that Cagliostro had lost £30 *and* his silver plate, for Crisp seems to have accepted the money before revealing to the Count that the pawn was no longer in his hands.

Now a little wisdom begins to mark the conduct of the Count, or is it to the Countess, with her feminine common-sense, that we may attribute their deciding to seek safer quarters than Suffolk Place had proved itself to be? They moved to O'Reilly's hotel, and O'Reilly, who seems at that time to have begrudged no effort on the Count's behalf, succeeded in procuring a lawyer who was able to recover those jewels that Cagliostro had lodged with Saunders as bail in the first of Miss Fry's actions. The Count's estimate of the probity of the English legal profession must have undergone an astonishing reversal when Mr. James, the attorney, announced the happy result of his activities. Mr. Trowbridge, in dealing with this part of Cagliostro's life, pays the Count the following just tribute:



“As he could, no doubt, have managed to decamp without returning the necklace or paying the costs of his trial as ordered by the arbitrator—the date named for the settlement was still some weeks off—it is, under the circumstances, and considering all that has been said against him, decidedly to his credit that he remained and fulfilled his obligations.”

I agree; but, with the exception of his early misdemeanours at Palermo, the Count's criminality did not take the form of petty swindling. I have admitted that I consider the Count to have been a rogue; but a rogue on a grand scale. He despised, and it is obvious that he despised, any such conduct as should seem unworthy of that rank to which he had elevated himself, and to which, for all we know, he may sincerely have believed himself to be entitled. At any rate, his conduct in London is the conduct of an honest man; of a fool, if you like; but of an honest fool, nevertheless.

Yet by now the fool had learnt his lesson. We have no reason to believe that O'Reilly and James were actuated by other than an honest indignation when they urged him to bring a suit against Aylett for perjury; another against Crisp for swindling; and yet another against Fry, Scot, Reynolds and Broad for blackmail. With such a lawyer as James, who seems to have been efficient in his profession, the chances are that such actions had, in all likelihood, succeeded. But the Count was not to be persuaded into throwing good money after bad, and he decided, with commendable prudence, to cut his losses, and to sever his connection altogether with those costly friends who had made his stay in London one not easily to be forgotten.

"The injustices I had experienced rendered me unjust to myself, and attributing to the whole nation the faults of a few individuals, I determined to leave a place in which I had found neither laws, justice nor hospitality."

On the other hand, his native perception does not seem to have deserted him even in this moment of humiliating disappointment. He did not allow his prejudice against the nation to influence his view of his friend, O'Reilly, for he gave to that gentleman his power of attorney, when he left for Brussels, taking with him a few jewels and little more than fifty pounds in cash. One may understand how much the Count felt in need of a holiday.

## XIV

WE are now arrived at a part of Cagliostro's history, in dealing with which it behoves the biographer to move with extreme delicacy, for the testimony of unbiased witness is scanty—indeed, all evidence is scanty—and much of the events of this period must be reconstructed from assumption and surmise. Thus, there now occurs one of those curious gaps with which the history of Alessandro is only too greatly marked; in this case, one of two years' interval. We know that he left England in 1777, and reappeared in Courland, a Baltic State, two years later. We have no news of him during those two years, but it should not be impossible to determine something of the nature of his activities, if we examine intelligently the nature of his activities in the months preceding his departure from England.

We know that whatever business it was in which he was engaged during his stay—his second stay—in England, it had nothing in common with that of the Frys—I should say the Scots—and their friends. We do know, and I think it as well that we sum up here exactly what we do know, that he was spending a large portion of his time in alchemical experiments, for the prosecution of which, ~~he~~ he had had, it will be remembered, a room fitted up in Whitcomb Street immediately after his taking apartments there. We do know, too, that O'Reilly befriended him in a manner singularly unusual. We know that

O'Reilly, besides being an hotel-keeper, was the master of a Masonic Lodge, and that Cagliostro was admitted to this lodge on April the 12th, 1777. The Lodge was named 'Esperance', and its members met in a room of the King's Head Tavern in Gerrard Street, Soho.

Unfortunately, we have only the account of Theveneau de Morande to rely upon for the particulars of the Count's initiation, and it seems to this biographer, as, indeed, it has seemed to other biographers, to be more biased than accurate. However, failing an alternative, I shall give in brief De Morande's version of the initiation.

According to the Editor of the *Courrier de l'Europe*, who tells us that his version is based upon the testimony of eye-witnesses, Cagliostro was admitted a member of the Lodge under the name of Joseph Cagliostro, Colonel of the Third Regiment of Brandenburg. It might be as well here to note two odd facts (if indeed they be facts) that, first: Cagliostro reverted to his old Christian name, and that, second, the Brandenburg Regiment was in the service of the King of Prussia, a monarch notorious for his patronage of Illuminism and Freemasonry. De Morande tells us that three other members were admitted at the same time: Pierre Boileau, a valet; Count Ricciarelli, musician and alchemist, aged 76; and Seraphina herself. The President of the gathering was Brother Hardivilliers, and if we may accept De Morande's word for it—a dangerous thing to do—Hardivilliers conducted his ceremony on lines that smack more of the pranks of schoolboys, or of the mumbo-jumbo of African witch doctors, than of the dignified ritual usually associated with the Masonic movement. For, according to De Morande, after the Countess had taken the requisite

oath, and had had her slender calf encircled with an embroidered garter, the Count was initiated in a far less sober manner. Cagliostro was raised into the air by means of rope and pulley-block, and then suddenly allowed to fall, an action which had the effect of injuring a hand. Alessandro's eyes then being blindfolded, he was given a loaded pistol and ordered to blow out his brains. Fortunately, the brains that he was ordered to blow out were still in possession of their faculties, and Alessandro declined to obey this somewhat arbitrary ordinance. In spite of the cries of 'coward!' that this refusal produced from the assembled brothers, the President would appear to have allowed Alessandro to make his own decisions in the matter of anticipating his natural death. An oath was then given to him to read, which, in view of what we know of Cagliostro's character, I think not unimportant to quote here.

"I, Joseph Cagliostro, in presence of the Great Architect of the Universe and of my superiors in this respectable assembly, promise to do all that I am ordered, and bind myself under penalties known only to my superiors; to obey them blindly, without questioning their motives, or seeking to discover the secret of the mysteries into which I shall be initiated either by word, sign, or writing."

Again—according to De Morande—a pistol was put into the hand of Alessandro. This time he obeyed the command of Brother Hardivilliers, and put the muzzle of the firearm to his brow. More than that, he pulled the trigger, and as he did so, a loud report was heard. But the report did not emanate from the pistol that Alessandro held. *His* flint struck sparks into an empty flash-pan, and his obedience found its vindication in the fact of his continued existence. De

Morande, who hated him, here pays, in this possibly spurious account of Cagliostro's initiation, an involuntary tribute to the man's courage.

Then—again according to De Morande, be it noted—Alessandro received a blow upon the head; the bandages were torn from his eyes; and he recovered his power of vision in order to witness the admiring glances of what were now his fellow-Masons.

It is important here to see the nature and origin of the Lodge to which Cagliostro had now secured admission. The Editor of the *Courrier de l'Europe* sneers at the Esperance Lodge because its members included men who sought their livelihood in lowly professions; a sneer that is unworthy of any man, seeing that Freemasonry claims the admiration of mankind for the very reason that De Morande affects to find so contemptible: I mean the abolishing those artificial barriers which exist to separate bodies of men. Freemasonry, whatever its faults, preaches this in common with all other religions: that voluntary submission to the will of a Being infinitely higher than the highest of Its votaries, renders all those votaries equal in Its sight. That the petty distinctions that snobbishness makes, endure, even after the admission of its members into the body of this religion, does not affect the validity of the arguments upon which such religion is reared. It matters not that your bishop looks down upon an East End curate, nor that a cardinal finds himself of more worth than a humble parish priest, nor that the Grand Master of some renowned Lodge speaks but with condescension to the newest member of some provincial and unfashionable Brotherhood: these perpetuations of human fallibility have nothing to do with the principles

that they shame. If anyone should call attention to the fact that Cagliostro sought admission to a Lodge whose members were mostly recruited from that class which supplies us with our pastry-cooks, our upholsterers and our valets, then what comment is to be made must surely be one which calls attention to the fact that Cagliostro understood, far better than do most, the principles under which Freemasonry was organised.

The Esperance Lodge was affiliated to the Order of Strict Observance, which was one of the many societies originating from the eighteenth century's interest in occultism and—as a corollary—rejection of established rule. The Order, when Cagliostro sought admission to it, was not old. It had been founded some thirty years before by a certain Baron von Hundt, whose object had been to revive that order of Knights Templars, which had been suppressed, with all the ferocity of which only the followers of Christ may command the secret, by Pope Clement V. The Grand Master of the Order, Jacques Molay, was burnt, as we know, by Philippe le Bel, King of France, a man who was at loggerheads with Pope Clement, but who was sufficiently under the influence of Christian training to be able to forget his differences with the Vicar of Christ in order to join cause with the Greatest Bridge-Builder against a common enemy.

A distinguished critic has recently called attention to the indisputable fact that the Byronic romanticism of the nineteenth century had its origin in the less widely known—or, rather, the less widely appreciated—romanticism of the eighteenth century. This romanticism was the conscious seeking of a different way of living; a seeking induced by a profound dissatisfaction with the way of living as men found

it. It is not, I hope, too trite to call the reader's attention to the fact that what we call romanticism is a product only of *ennui*. No man who is contented with his present lot seeks translation into a world where things are nearer to his standard of what is good. The very discontent that the conditions of the eighteenth century aroused in the minds of practically all men, drove those men, rulers and ruled alike, to seek an artificial contentment in the contemplation of a form of existence as little like their own as it was possible for their wishful thinking to make it.

For consider: we know, because history tells us so, that the Lodges of eighteenth-century Masonry became the foci of revolutionary thought and activity; but when such men as Baron von Hundt started their Masonic movements, surely no such practical consideration as moved the revolutionaries of the Terror moved them. I confess that I may see in Baron von Hundt's resurrection of the six-hundred-year-dead Order of Knights Templars nothing more than that sentimental longing for the past which so sadly afflicts all who find the present too lacking in those things which make for human happiness. As children seek to widen the dismal circumscriptions of the backyard by adopting the manners and customs of Red Indians or cowboys, so do men no less try to push back the constricting horizons of the drab everyday by seeking to incorporate into the petty interval of their lives those worlds which lie centuries gone or to come. Nor indeed, much as we may deplore the shedding of blood and the burning of buildings that belong to most expressions of the revolutionary tendency in man, must we forget that revolution in itself is but an expression of the romantic urge: the clash of the



world that should be with the world that is. Even Napoleon, that hard-headed opportunist, who resurrected revolution for his own ends, found himself unable to withstand the romantic sentiment of the age into which he was born. The Terror had come and gone; the Royalists had crept back, and had gained control of those very revolutionary organisations which had killed royalism. Napoleon waited until stalemate had come in the struggle between revolution and reaction; then in one swift *coup d'état*, he swept both the revolutionaries and the reactionaries away in order to combine in himself the qualities of both. For consider how he swept away such of outworn customs as had been spared by the revolutionaries; he gave France a legal code; he established, far more surely than had any revolutionary that had used the parrot cry of 'Liberty!', the rights of man. For the first time in France's long history he balanced her budget; when France's economic system was attacked by the smuggling in of Pitt's forged assignats, Napoleon re-established the gold standard. These were the acts of a man whose pitiless logic serves his fellows better than does the fuzzy sentimentality of your academic revolutionary. And yet, could Napoleon himself withstand the romantic urge? Look at the furniture and the dresses of his day. First, when he becomes First Consul in that parody of the republican Roman system, he is dressed and surrounded by the eighteenth-century pastiche of Republican art. His hired artists are set to interpreting Rome according to the needs of modern revolutionary France. This is the first step: what follows afterwards is inevitable. As the kings of Rome gave way to the Republic, and the Republic, in its turn, gave way



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LOUIS XVI  
THE PORTRAIT BY DUPLESSIS



to the Empire, so did the Republic One and Indivisible give way to the Empire of the French. The clear minded opportunist emerges as Emperor, dressed in all the buffoon extravagance of painter David's fancy; and so bewitched of romance is this realist that he crowns himself with the crown of St. Louis, and seeks to resurrect what he himself has destroyed but a year or two gone: the Roman Empire.

But how free was this man himself from that sentimental longing to recreate worlds that had gone, and which only his own dissatisfaction with a present made seem admirable? Look at the furniture with which he surrounded himself, and you have your answer. Look at the dresses of the women, and the titles of the men. Had Napoleon, the hard-headed little artillery officer, who knew well—only too well—how many beans made five, had his way, the Paris of 1798 had been a reconstruction of Consular Rome far more accurate and wholesale than ever Hollywood producer has wrought out of the labours of his hired archaeologists.

No, whether Romance leads to Revolution, or Revolution it is that breeds romance, no one can say, for the two things seem to be simultaneous in their incidence, so that no man may say which comes first, or whether indeed the two things are different. All that we know is, that those movements which started with no more revolutionary tendency than to seek, in a sentimental way, to recapture some aspects of a vanished world, became, almost before men had time to appreciate the significance of the change, organisations actively striving to destroy the social order, although it was not clear to the members of these organisations what new order they should put in place of the old.

It has often been remarked with surprise that the

home of Illuminism and other forms of Freemasonry was, in the eighteenth century, Germany, and that the German kings gave their patronage to such movements even after the revolutionary tendency of them was revealed beyond mistaking. People have wondered why such a king as, for instance, Frederick of Prussia, should have encouraged these revolutionaries; but the answer is surely to be found in the fact that Frederick was a revolutionary, too; only with this exception, that his revolutionary tendency lay along practical, while those of his protégés lay along academical, lines. In other words, Frederick set out to use Freemasons, Jesuits or any other body which might be used, as his tools; and the purpose for which he intended those tools to be employed was none other than the advancing his own interests. Holy Alliances are all very well theoretically, but they work badly in actual practice. Kings are as ready to cut each other's throats as any other executives of big business, and what Frederick of Prussia was doing when he encouraged the enemies of Kings and the Church was exactly what his successor of 1917, Kaiser William II, was doing when he sent Lenin and Trotsky in a sealed train through Germany in order to overthrow an Emperor anointed by God. Examining dispassionately the history of eighteenth-century revolutionary mysticism, it cannot but seem to the historian that the kings were less the dupes and victims of this revolutionary mysticism than were the revolutionaries perverted by the self-seeking of the kings. The kings hoped to advance their political interests through these organisations; it was not the first time in history that men, even kings, learnt the lesson that to sup with the devil one needs a long spoon.

## XV

WE now come to the most mysterious part of Cagliostro's life, for we are faced with a problem which is soluble only by surmise, since at present there exists no documentary evidence to enable us to answer the question: Why did Cagliostro leave London in the November of 1777 an unknown man, and turn up seventeen months later in Courland a person of considerable importance? He himself gives us no hint, nor does the Inquisition-Biographer seem to have discovered what exactly Cagliostro did in order so quickly to lay the foundations of a great reputation. Cagliostro says, "my fifty guineas, which was all that I possessed on leaving London, took me as far as Brussels, where I found Providence waiting to replenish my purse".

There is, alas!, something altogether too equivocally modest about this remark. One would like to know in which manner Providence revealed itself to the Count. Such ambiguous statements have been one of the chief causes of history's condemnation of Alessandro, and it must be admitted that the man himself, for all that he represented himself the victim of his enemies' intrigues, hardly contributed to his own good name.

But let us see if we cannot discover the probable cause of Cagliostro's sudden acquisition of fame. We know that he did actually become a member of the Order of Strict Observance, for his diploma (that cost him five guineas) was formerly in the collection of autographs belonging to the Marquess de Chateaugiron. We know, too, that the Order of Strict

Observance was not, at any rate at the beginning of its career, a seditious organisation. That it had revived—or supposed itself to have revived—the order of Knights Templars would naturally earn it the disapprobation of that Church which had suppressed the original Knights Templars and whose Pope had ordered the burning alive of the Templars' Grand Master. But the Church's condemnation of this body is no proof that it had sinister designs in its inception, and it is as well to remember that the Jesuits themselves had been suppressed by the Pope. Indeed, the Church of Rome would seem in the eighteenth century to have been afflicted with what can only be called 'Spy Fever'. Hanging jealously on to its privileges, even where the tenure of such privileges conflicted with the rights of the people and, indeed, the whole economic stability of Europe, the Church viewed with alarm the activities of such men as D'Argenson, who pleaded with the Church to renounce a little that they might keep much; rather than, in attempting to hold on to what obviously was impossible of retaining, they should lose everything. These liberal ideas filled Pontiff and Cardinals with alarm, and every manifestation of liberal sentiment was condemned by the Church with all the vehemence known only to the ecclesiastical mind.

Thus was Baron von Hundt's Order of Strict Observance condemned by the Church, although, from its Statutes, it would appear originally to have been a philanthropic organisation much after the manner of our present Shepherds, Druids, Rechabites or Buffaloes, and, possessing a ritual as do they, have been no more revolutionary in sentiment than are the Societies called today Poor Men's Masonry. The Order of

Strict Observance had Lodges all over Europe, and it is probable—indeed, highly probable—that Cagliostro was sent abroad as a representative of the Esperance Lodge. Why do I put forward this suggestion? I give the following reasons: firstly, there was a real necessity for Cagliostro's leaving England at this time, in view of the odious persecution to which he had been subjected, and it seems to me that O'Reilly, who, it will be remembered, gave him his fifty guineas travelling expenses, may well have suggested that he combine pleasure with business, and act as emissary to the Mother Lodge in Germany. The second and third reasons follow on: an emissary being needed, who fairer as choice than the travelled nobleman whose command of continental towns is so much better than his command of English? While, thirdly, we have it on the authority of Theveneau de Morande that the other members of the Lodge were hairdressers and upholsterers, shoemakers and valets, persons who, however worthy, would hardly be expected to comport themselves with the dignity inherent in the Count's manner.

The Providence, then, that smiled on him in Brussels was, in all probability, a favourable reception by the Master of the Lodge situated in that city. The Inquisition-Biographer has a tale of Cagliostro's appearing at Venice, there to engage in fraud under the name of the Marchese Pellegrini, but the story, as one biographer rightly suggests, should be dismissed with contempt, seeing that it is hardly likely that Count Cagliostro should decide to adopt an alias which had already served its purpose, and which, in any case, was marked in the records of the police officers. More likely appears another reported adventure, which, it is claimed, befell the Count in



Nuremburg. It is said that, meeting a prominent Mason of the town, Cagliostro was asked his name. For answer he took pencil and paper and silently drew the picture of a serpent biting its own tail. This mysterious mode of reply seems to have convinced his questioner that he was met with a Brother of such eminence that his name was not likely to be revealed, and the story goes on further to tell how the man drew from his hand a diamond ring and, pressing it upon Cagliostro with every mark of respect, expressed the hope that it might enable him more easily to elude his enemies. From Nuremburg he would seem to have gone to Berlin, there to discover that Frederick the Great could make exceptions even for Freemasons; for the attentions of his police became so embarrassing that the Count left hurriedly for Leipzig, where his figure begins to emerge once more into something like reality. The Lodge of Strict Observance in that city gave, so it is said, a banquet in honour of the Count, "at which three plates, three bottles, and three glasses were set before each guest in commemoration of the Holy Trinity". There is a pretty touch of symbolism about the three bottles!

It will be observed in passing that, even if we cannot say for certain that Cagliostro was travelling about as liaison-officer for the Order, he certainly kept in touch with the various Lodges. But the importance of that visit to Leipzig becomes apparent when we read that there, for the second time (the first was at the Lodge in the Hague) he preached to the assembled Brothers on the principles of Egyptian Masonry, that curious rite with which his name will ever be associated, and which was to make and to break him.

The Brothers were impressed by the Count's

exposition, though it is more probable that they were impressed by the manner, rather than by the matter, of the discourse. We have seen too many sad examples in our own day of the greater attractiveness of sound than sense that we should wonder how Cagliostro rendered plausible the fantastic principles that he was now espousing.

For what was this so called Egyptian Masonry? Well, it was really nothing more than a variant on the popular eighteenth-century theme that what was primitive must also have been perfect. Rousseau professed to see human perfection in the noble savage; Cagliostro found it in the days of Moses and the Hebrew prophets, who were supposed to have been the expounders of the Egyptian theology, a curiously unusual example of forgiveness on the part of the Jews, seeing that Moses, in spite of his Egyptian education, can hardly have borne any love for Pharaoh. Still, there it was: go back far enough and you'll find perfection; not an unreasonable point of view for a century that could not help but observe that the more modern man had got, the worse his behaviour had become. What Cagliostro declared was this: that (I quote another historian now) "Egyptian Masonry had for its aim the moral regeneration of mankind. As the revelations made to men by the Creator (of whom he never failed to speak with the profoundest respect) had, in his opinion, been altered to subserve their own purposes by the prophets, apostles and fathers of the Church, the regeneration of mankind was only to be accomplished by restoring the knowledge of God in all its purity. This Cagliostro professed was only to be effected by Egyptian Masonry, which he declared had been founded by the Patriarchs,

whom he regarded as the last and sole depositories of the truth as the means of communicating with the invisible world ”.

I do agree, I must confess, with Mr. Trowbridge, when he claims that in spite of his vanity and ostentation, Cagliostro was animated by a genuine enthusiasm for the cause of humanity. Mr. Trowbridge does not give his reasons, but they are doubtless the reasons that I myself would advance. In Cagliostro's youth he had known much kindness, and the principles which had been inculcated in him by that decent, pious family whom Goethe afterwards visited and described to us, while ignored in the wild days of his puppyhood, cannot have been entirely without their influence when the years of separation from home-scenes, and the nostalgia that such separation inevitably induces, had inclined the Count more and more sentimentally to regard the poverty-stricken days of Palermo. There is, and many readers must have noticed it, a curious quality of Robin Hood about the great bandits of this world. Their banditry comes in the first place from a sincere conviction that the world is too greatly in their debt. First, they seek to adjust the balance of accounts, as regards themselves; and second, when the discrepancy has been put right in their own case, they seek to adjust the disparities in the case of others. There have been few of the great swindlers of this world who have not been actuated, as I feel that Cagliostro was actuated, by this generous impulse to see others as successful as they themselves have become.

If this biographer were asked to state at what point Cagliostro's fame became assured, he would point to

that dinner at Leipzig. Symbolism apart, it would seem that the three bottles did their job as well as at less religious junketings. For the Count did not content himself with a mere recital of the virtues of his own brand of Masonry, but drew invidious comparisons between it and the brand that he wished it to replace. He called on the assembled Brothers to renounce Strict Observance in favour of the Rite of Egypt, and carried away by his own enthusiasm (to say nothing of the drink) he turned to Scieffort, the Master of the Lodge, and laid his hands on the man's shoulders, assuring him, with an impressing solemnity, that if he did not adopt the Egyptian Rite forthwith, he would feel the hand of God upon him before the expiration of a month. Poor Scieffort could hardly have decided to commit suicide in order to put Cagliostro in the right, but die he certainly did, and well within the time limit set by the Count. The remarkable vindication of this prophecy, taken in conjunction with the air of conviction with which it had been uttered, caused the Count's name to be bruited about the city. Nothing more had been needed in order to assure the Count's fame. The Inquisition-Biographer is probably correct when he says that, on leaving the city, not only did Cagliostro receive from his admirers the money for his hotel bill, but they presented him with a considerable sum besides. There is no doubt about it, Cagliostro was certainly on the path to fortune when he left Soho for Brussels.

From Leipzig he went to Danzig and Koenigsberg, two cities where the philanthropical tenets of the Order had been subordinated almost completely to the pursuit of the Occult. No doubt the cordial reception that the Brothers of the Lodges in these

two places accorded Cagliostro was inspired by the Count's own claims to occult knowledge, and as supply usually follows demand, it is not surprising to note a revival from Danzig onwards of the Count's occult interests. He had not forgotten that episode in Palermo in which his companions were shown the supernatural vision of the little girl at play.

Thus, by easy stages he came to Courland, his fame, increasing daily as he vouchsafed his friends the proofs of his power that they demanded, preceding him.

One author rightly calls attention to the bleak nature of the country of Courland, pointing out that only a powerful reason could have taken a man from the hospitality of the pleasant German capital to face the rigours of spring on the Baltic marshes. This reason was the founding of his Order of Egyptian Masonry, the principles of which, so he claimed, were discovered by him in a manuscript that he had purchased while living in London.

Egyptian Masonry, as Cagliostro either revealed or invented it, was, as I have said, concerned with discovering once more, in its first purity, God's revelation to man of his own will. It would be unfair to blame Cagliostro for all the mumbo-jumbo and hugaboo with which the ceremonies were conducted. The most sincere preacher of the most exalted faith had failed lamentably in his mission of conversion had he come before the people in those days offering them nothing more than faith or logic. Cagliostro, aided, no doubt, by a constitutional exhibitionism, provided these elaborate ceremonies, with all their mummery of dress and words and titles, in response to a very clearly indicated demand, and those who find Egyptian Masonry so laughable or contemptible

must not spare the disciples when they condemn the Master.

There is a pleasing anticipation of twentieth-century tolerance in Cagliostro's decision to admit both sexes to membership of his Order. Possibly Seraphina wanted to keep an eye on her husband, while possibly Cagliostro wanted to keep an eye on his wife. Which-ever it was, the difficulty was resolved by Cagliostro's assuming the title of Grand Cophta, which he declared to be that of Enoch, the First Grand Master of Egyptian Masonry. His wife assumed two titles, both of which the cynical may find not unbecoming: Grand Mistress and Queen of Sheba. Conditions of membership were not arduous. It was necessary only to profess belief in the immortality of the soul, while the men had, in addition, to have belonged previously to some other Masonic Order, a condition which inclines me to think that Cagliostro was embarked on an ambitious scheme of amalgamating the various Lodges, though whether on his own behalf or as agent for some superior organising genius it is not easy to say. Certainly Frederick seems to have regarded him with anything but favour, and to have rejected the view held by such people as De Morande that the Count's Order was actively conspiring to destroy the Crown of France. For if Frederick had thought that, there is no doubt that he might have commanded more than Frederick's patronage. No, I think that whatever game Cagliostro was up to, he was in it for his own benefit, and that benefit was not to be served by mere political plotting. There is something altogether too vague and airy about the enunciated principles of Egyptian Masonry; there is a smack of the wishful thinking of Fabian socialism about them: of armchair philoso-

phising and a sighing regret that never translates itself into action. Cagliostro, although he did many foolish things, was not a fool, and only a fool would have wanted to alter a system which had served him very well. I forget now who pointed out the fallacy of the remark that it's the poor who help the poor, dismissing that same remark with a contemptuous comment that the poor could hardly help the poor, seeing that they cannot even help themselves. And Cagliostro, reflecting on the changes that had come upon him since he ran barefooted and ragged about the back-alleys of Palermo, cannot but have reflected that the world had served him very ill had there been in it only people as poor as he had been. Cagliostro was engaged in a business which depended for its success upon the existence and the continued existence of rich people; upon rich people whose boredom he might alleviate, and for which alleviation they would be prepared, and could afford, to pay him in cash. The only revolution that Cagliostro ever consciously worked for was that revolution by which he was converted from a penniless street-arab into a nobleman of culture and wealth.<sup>1</sup>

In the March of 1779 he reached Mittau, capital city of the Duchy of Courland. The Inquisition-Biographer puts forward the hardly tenable suggestion that Cagliostro was about to make a bid for the ducal crown, but he adduces no evidence in favour of this suggestion. I think, therefore, we may assume that Cagliostro came to Mittau only for the purpose of prosecuting his scheme for establishing the Egyptian Rite and because he knew that in Mittau a welcome even more fervent than usual was awaiting him.

<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that he did not work for revolutionaries: he most certainly did. But his aims were, I believe, always personal.

The head of the Order in Mittau was a certain Marshal von Medem, and the Marshal and his brother had been engaged in the study of alchemy and magic since their boyhood. The Marshal's brother, Count von Medem, was the father-in-law to the reigning Duke of Courland, who had married the younger of the Count's daughters. It was obvious therefore that in Cagliostro's coming to Mittau he had walked straight into the highest circles of Eastern German society. But it was the elder of the Count's daughters, Elise, Countess von der Recke, who was to have a marked influence upon the Count's career. The Countess had been married at the age of seventeen, under the compulsion of her father, but her husband's nature was not such as to satisfy all the demands of her warm-hearted temperament, and after six years the Count had obtained a divorce; the Countess returning home. The Von Medems would seem to have been a family at once affectionate and united. Between the Countess and her sister, the Duchess of Courland, existed a warm friendship, while for her younger brother the Countess entertained the deepest devotion. Brought up in an atmosphere of mysticism, Elise had not been able to resist falling under the spell of a mystical philosophy, but while her own tastes inclined more to Swedenborg and St. Martin, her brother's inclined more towards the pagan philosophies of Plato and Pythagoras. We have seen that her uncle and her father were both deeply tinged with similar mysticism.

Countess Elise had once declared that the occult, as investigated by her uncle and her father, earned only her contempt; that the wonders of the supernatural "made less impression on her than the tale



of Blue Beard; while a concert was worth all the ghosts in the world". All the same, she was a mystic as much as her uncle, her father, and her brother; it was only that her mysticism followed a different course. The arrival of the Count Cagliostro was to prove that to her.

It so happened that the beloved brother of Elise had died but a short time before the arrival of the Count. She had heard of the wonders that this man could perform: of his power to transmute metals, to foretell the winning numbers of lotteries, and to show clearly the faces of those residing many miles away. Was it not possible that among his powers was that possessed by the witch of Endor? and might not the Count prove himself a nexus between this world and the unseen sphere of existence? Might he not bring back at least a shadow of her dead brother to the broken-hearted girl? Count Cagliostro arrived in Mittau to find waiting for him one who was prepared to credit him with powers to which not his own excessive vanity had hitherto caused him to lay claim. But even the obvious credulity and trust of the Countess von der Recke could not interfere with the Count's prescribed programme. He always announced his arrival into a new Lodge by denouncing the excessive addiction of the Masons to the follies of magic and alchemy. What was needed, said Cagliostro, was less a transmutation of metals than a transformation of the soul; what was needed was moral regeneration (what Mr. Bunny Austin calls moral re-armament) and he counselled the application of less time and energy to the discovering the elixir of life.

This was all very well for the religious Countess Elise, whom a reading of Swedenborg's works had

inclined towards a reception of such mystical balderdash, but it was not to the liking of Marshal von Medem and his brother, who had spent a lifetime in the pursuit of the very vanities that the Count was condemning. They demanded proof of the occult powers so widely advertised as the Count's perquisites, and as the Count needed the support of these two powerful men in the establishment of his Egyptian Lodge, he was forced to accede to their request.

Mr. Trowbridge calls attention to the fact that "it is characteristic of the tyranny of ideals to demand their realisation of the enthusiast, if need be at the cost of life, honour, or happiness. All reformers," he says, "magnetic enough to attract any notice have been obliged to face this lion-like temptation at some time in their career". The same biographer points out that Cagliostro paid for his attempt to regenerate mankind with his honour, but that, had he succeeded, as Swedenborg, who had a precisely similar ideal, and also had recourse to imposture when it suited his purpose, the Count's reputation, like the Swede's, would have survived the calumny which assailed it. "For though Cagliostro debased his ideal to realise it, his impostures did not make him an impostor, any more than Mirabeau can be said to have been bought by the bribes he accepted from the Court."

I think the biographer is allowing his enthusiasm to get the better of that calmness that the historian must aim to preserve. I do not think that we have the right to admit without stronger proof than at present we possess that Cagliostro desired to regenerate more of mankind than was represented by Seraphina and himself. On the other hand, if Mr. Trowbridge

is right, and I am wrong, then Mr. Trowbridge is undoubtedly right when he says that Cagliostro, in common with the others of his century, felt that the end justified the means, and that if he could put over some doctrine with the aid of a little sleight of hand, as Mrs. Amy Semple Macpherson, by means of her torch-singing angels, puts over the beauty and majesty of God, then the artless deception were well justified. In such a light must the custodians of the various shrines of Christendom view the miracles in their charge: the levitated bodies, the bleeding statues, and the phials of liquefying blood. At any rate, we must admit that the Count, whether we regard him as misguided reformer or conscious charlatan, was submitting to *force majeure* when he agreed to give the Von Medems some proof of his occult powers.

Some months ago I wrote an article for a London paper in which I enunciated the view that what we call clairvoyance is a gift—a faculty rather—which originally was inherent in all mankind. I pointed out that there have been many authenticated instances of clairvoyance and clairsaudience which could not be dismissed as hallucinations, and I pointed out that most of us had had the strange experience of imagining that we saw a certain person in the street only to encounter that person a little later. Most of us, too, have had the experience of dreaming of certain subjects, only to have our dream broken, as they say; while in various other ways a sense of prevision seems to come to us. I pointed out the significant fact that most of these ‘coincidences’ were concerned with trivialities, and that rarely did they concern anything of major importance. I claimed that in this fact (for it is a fact) reposed the evidence that once upon

a time the power of prevision, of clairvoyance and clairaudience—what is known as extra-sensory perception—was a sense as developed as that of ordinary vision and hearing. I said that we had lost that sense by our own cowardice; that just as we may shut out an unpleasant sight by lowering our eyelids, so had we set up a defence-mechanism by which that extra-sensory perception was deprived of its power. We did not wish to know what the morrow would bring, for it might bring unhappiness; and we were prepared to blind ourselves; accepting the wisdom of the apophthegm that claims that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Yet occasionally, when we are not thinking, the defensive screen that we have erected between ourselves and knowledge breaks down, and for one moment unimportant things are allowed to be seen; which is why coincidences are mostly concerned with trivialities. I hold the view, as I have said before, that all men know *everything* that is happening in nature, or could know, rather, had they the courage to open their eyes.

This digression is necessary in order to explain that I hold Count di Cagliostro's experiments in clairvoyance to have at least a basis in probability. In other words, I do not affirm that he had those powers that he claimed, but that he might well have had them, seeing that they do exist in nature. And if others may possess these powers, why may not the Count have done so?

But let us go back to the actual happenings at Courland. The Count, agreeing to give a demonstration of his powers, arranged that the two Von Medems, a Herr von Howen and the Countess von der Recke should be present while he endeavoured to use the little son of Marshal von Medem as a

medium. There is no doubt that Cagliostro was at this time deeply under the influence of Mesmer's teachings, the fame of which had already spread over Europe. Mesmer himself had but developed the theses of Father Hell, who himself owed his theories of animal magnetism to that remarkable instance of fanaticism, exhibited by those who gathered around the tomb of the Jansenist priest, Father Paris, and to whom has been given the name of *The Convulsionaries of St. Médard*. It is significant to note that Mesmer had arrived in Paris but the year before Cagliostro's arrival in Courland, and having converted Monsieur d'Eslon, a noted physician, had established his theories of animal magnetism as the most popular in Paris. I quote Mackay's description:

"Mesmer was the rage; and high and low, rich and poor, credulous and unbelieving, all hastened to convince themselves of the power of this mighty magician, who made such magnificent promises. Mesmer, who knew as well as any man living the influence of the imagination, determined that on that score nothing should be wanting to heighten the effect of the magnetic charm. In all Paris there was not a house so charmingly furnished as Monsieur Mesmer's. Richly stained glass shed a dim religious light on his spacious saloons, which were almost covered with mirrors. Orange blossoms scented all the air of his corridors; incense of the most expensive kind burned in antique vases on his chimney pieces; aeolian harps sighed melodious music from distant chambers; while sometimes a sweet female voice, from above or below, stole softly upon the mysterious silence that was kept in the house, and insisted upon from all visitors. . . .

"The following was the mode of operation: in the centre of the saloon was placed an oval vessel, about four feet in its longest diameter and one foot deep. In this were laid a number of wine bottles, filled with magnetised water, well corked up, and disposed in radii, with their necks outwards. Water was then poured into the vessel so as just to cover the bottles, and filings of iron were thrown in occasionally to heighten the magnetic effect. The vessel was then covered with an iron cover, pierced through with many holes, and was called the *baquet*. From each hole issued a long moveable rod of iron, which the patients were to apply to such parts of their bodies as were afflicted. Around this *baquet* the patients were directed to sit, holding each other by the hand, and pressing their knees together as closely as possible, to facilitate the passage of the magnetic fluid from one to the other.

"Then came in the assistant magnetizers, generally strong, handsome young men, to pour into the patient from their finger tips fresh streams of the wonderful fluid. They embraced the patients between the knees, rubbed them gently down the spine and the course of the nerves, using gentle pressure upon the breasts of the ladies, and staring them out of countenance to magnetize (i.e. hypnotise) them by the eye. . . .

"Gradually the cheeks of the ladies began to glow, their imaginations to become inflamed; and off they went, one after the other, in convulsive fits. Some of them sobbed and tore their hair, others laughed till the tears ran from their eyes, while others shrieked and screamed and yelled until they became insensible altogether.

"This was the crisis of the delirium. In the midst

of it, the chief actor made his appearance, waving his wand, like Prospero, to work new wonders. Dressed in a long robe of lilac coloured silk, richly embroidered with gold flowers . . . he awed the still sensible by his eye, and the violence of their symptoms diminished. He stroked the insensible with his hands upon the eyebrows and down the spine; traced figures upon their breast and abdomen with his long white wand, and they were restored to consciousness."

"It is impossible," says Monsieur Dupotet, "to conceive the sensation which Mesmer's experiments created in Paris." I can readily believe it! Mackay, in commenting on the controversy, adds: "At Court, the Queen expressed herself in favour of it, and nothing else was to be heard of in society."

This accurate description of Mesmer's professional methods will give us some idea of the circumstances in which Cagliostro, even had he chosen otherwise, would have been expected to preach his faith. The inference to be drawn from the presence of so much mumbo-jumbo in the professional activities of a man like Mesmer, who claimed recognition by the Council of the French Academy of Sciences, and thus who, although a quack, affected the pose of a legitimate medical practitioner, is that the people of that time were more interested in manner than in matter, a fact which is also apparent in the polished sterility of eighteenth-century art.

Very well then, while Mesmer was laying the foundations of his fame in Paris, Cagliostro was doing the same thing for himself in the much less fashionable city of Mittau. We may be sure that Cagliostro, in whose methods the historian cannot fail to see a striking likeness to Mesmer's own, did

not fail to keep himself informed of the activities of the man who had stolen a march upon him.

The resemblance between Cagliostro and Mesmer, or rather the proof that Cagliostro, even if he did not purposely imitate Mesmer, had referred himself to a common source of inspiration, is made manifest by the great part which hypnotism played in the ritual of Egyptian Masonry.

Some years ago one of my friends, more bibliophil than honest, removed from my shelves a crown octavo volume, embellished with aquatints, and entitled *The Nineteenth-century Necromancer*. I wish that I might put my hands upon this book at the moment, for I should then be able to quote in full such a ritual as that employed by the Count. This book was published in the early part of the nineteenth century; and the high standard of its format, taken in conjunction with the name of the publisher, shows that it must have been produced for an educated public. It provided me with an illuminating commentary on the superstition which had survived even the disillusioning years of revolution in France and war in Europe, for it quite seriously gives a formula for summoning up Egin, King of the North; it tells one how the dead are to be raised; and it instructs one concerning the best means of summoning elementals to do one's bidding, notably to discover for the reader the location of hidden gold. For the illustration of this balderdash the publishers had commissioned a well-known artist and engraver to prepare aquatint plates of a very high quality. Had the book been remaindered, the loss to the publishers had been considerable; the early nineteenth-century publisher worked far less on a speculative basis than



does his twentieth-century successor. We may take it therefore that the publisher of this preposterous nonsense had been reasonably assured, before undertaking publication of the book, that it stood a chance of success.

The ritual of Cagliostro followed traditional lines. There was the same pantheistic farrago of names: Apollo and Diana and Astarte and Jahveh. The Marquess de Luchet, in his spurious *Mémoires Authentiques*; which were neither memoirs nor authentic, and which were written in order to ridicule the Count; contain, nevertheless, certain statements concerning whose authenticity there can be no doubt. He mentions that, among the ritualistic phrases used by Alessandro, was an invocation to "Helios, Mene, Tetragrammaton!" Mr. Trowbridge thinks, from De Luchet's comment on this phrase, that the Marquess was unacquainted with their significance and believed them to be gibberish. Mr. Trowbridge (incidentally, spelling Tetragrammaton wrongly) very kindly tells us that these words mean respectively sun, moon, and the four consonants of the Hebrew name for God. He assures us that "as a matter of fact they are often employed in Freemasonry". He might have added that the phrase Tetragrammaton is used because the letters JHVH (which could be pronounced Jahveh) were never pronounced by the Jewish priests, and that wherever, in their holy writings, they encountered the Tetragrammaton, they substituted for it the word *Adonai*, which means Lord. I am perfectly certain that De Luchet's classical education, in a day when every man of culture had at least a smattering of Latin and Greek, and when such a seeker after knowledge as Dr. Samuel Johnson preferred to rely rather on

Latin than on French to take him around the Continent, would not have permitted him to be ignorant of the significance of these three Greek words. No, when De Luchet laughs at Cagliostro's employment of this invocation, he laughs because he has heard the invocation so often before. In other words, it is Cagliostro's very employment of this time-worn phrase that convinces De Luchet that in Cagliostro he has encountered but one more of the charlatans who are using the traditional hocus-pocus of half-baked mysticism. This is how De Luchet describes Cagliostro's acquisition of his ritual: "The Grand Cophta borrowed them from a conjurer, who, in his turn, had been taught them by a spirit, which spirit was no other than the soul of a cabalistic Jew who had murdered his father". Mr. Trowbridge finds this statement an example of De Luchet's malicious wit; I think it more probable that it is an actual quotation from one of Cagliostro's explanations, for Cagliostro did make statements quite as preposterous.

The ceremony of initiation consisted in the neophytes being 'breathed upon' by the Grand Master, a thing which reminds us very much of Mesmer with his eye-fixing tricks. This breathing was accompanied by the swinging of censors, probably a very necessary precaution in the days before Listerine had saved one's friends the regrettable necessity of telling one. After those three bottles drunk in honour of the Holy Trinity, it must have been enough for the Grand Cophta to have breathed upon his disciples to have laid them out as effectively as ever Mesmer contrived with his hypnotic eye.

After a speech by the Grand Cophta, overloaded with the highest moral platitudes, the ceremony

ended with a séance. It is with these séances that we are most concerned. For it was Cagliostro's practice to employ a small child as the medium; such mediums being known as *pupille* or *colombe*, according respectively as they were boy or girl. The medium was rendered clairvoyant by Cagliostro's "breathing on its face from the brow to the chin." The other parts of the ceremony accorded with traditional usage, including the invocation of the shades of well-known historical characters, the singing of hymns, the drinking of various potations, and the laying of hands on the sick.

But in Mittau, it was with the séance part of the ceremony that Cagliostro's new friends seemed to have been most concerned. This is understandable when we consider that Marshal von Medem was the Master of a Lodge himself, and must have heard the old phrases of invocation quite enough. However, as part of the mechanism of the hypnotic act resided in the mental state induced by the preliminary rites, it was necessary to go through at least an abridged version of the ceremony, even though the Countess von der Recke could have dispensed with the Masonic part of the ritual and was concerned only with the evoking her dead brother's ghost.

Marshal von Medem's little son was to be *pupille*. Thus events proceeded:

"Having anointed the head and left hand of the child with the 'oil of wisdom', Cagliostro inscribed some mystic letters on the anointed hand and bade the *pupille* to look at it steadily. Hymns and prayers then followed, till little Von Medem became greatly agitated and perspired profusely. Cagliostro then enquired in a stage whisper of the Marshal what he

desired his son to see. Not to frighten him, his father requested that he might see his sister. Hereupon the child, still gazing steadfastly at his hand, declared that he saw her.

“Questioned as to what she was doing, he described her as placing her hand on her heart, as if in pain. A moment later he exclaimed, ‘now she is kissing my brother, who has just come home’. On the Marshal’s declaring this to be impossible, as this brother was leagues away, Cagliostro terminated the séance, and with an air of the greatest confidence ordered the doubting parent to verify the vision. This the Marshal immediately proceeded to do; and learnt that his son, whom he believed so far away, had unexpectedly returned home and that shortly before her brother’s arrival his daughter had had an attack of palpitation of the heart.”

This was a triumph for Cagliostro which effectively quelled all opposition, but it was a triumph which put Cagliostro in a cleft stick, for now that the Count had proved himself capable of performing the wonders with which rumour credited him, the Von Medem brothers naturally believed that their guest would be able to gratify all those desires which hitherto they had fruitlessly pursued. But first of all Cagliostro had payment to take for his obliging the Marshal, and this payment was exacted in the form of permission to establish a Lodge of Egyptian Masonry at Mittau, of which, naturally, the Marshal and his brother became initiates. It will appear that the Countess von der Recke came too, a thing that Cagliostro would have been wiser to have prevented her doing, for while the Countess had been much attracted to Cagliostro’s vague references to moral regeneration,

she found his unorthodox references to the Christian religion undeniably disconcerting. But again, in the case of the Countess, Cagliostro had raised hopes that he was being called upon to gratify. The Countess Elise desired most ardently to see the spirit of her dead brother, just as her living brothers wished for further proof of Cagliostro's power. Cagliostro realised that both the brothers and the sister would need to be satisfied if they were to do for him what he wished. He decided to tackle first the problem of the Marshal and the Count von Medem.

It would seem that it was at a meeting of the Lodge that he first declared the revelation to him of the existence of a buried treasure, consisting in important magical manuscripts and instruments, as well as a great horde of gold and silver, which things had been buried hundreds of years before by a great wizard. Questioned by the Marshal as to the exact location of this treasure, Cagliostro told him that it was buried on a certain heath in the neighbourhood of the Marshal's family estate at Wilzen. This heath Cagliostro described minutely, and such is the power of persuasion that comes from self deception that the Marshal found himself astonished at the accuracy with which Cagliostro pictured a place that he had never visited, although a moment's sane reflection might have told the Marshal that heaths are very much alike the world over. But the Marshal was in no mood for calm reflection, and he found another extraordinary confirmation of the possibility, even if not the probability, of Alessandro's tale, in the recollection that the existence of such a treasure had long been claimed by the peasants of the neighbourhood.

I think here that we will examine the contention of Cagliostro's latest biographer, that to the greedy inquisitiveness of the Von Medem brothers may be attributed Cagliostro's descent into fraud. According to this writer "the Countess's interest in the occult was of quite a different character from that of her father and uncle. Deeply religious, she had turned in her grief to mysticism for consolation . . . While others conversed with him on magic and necromancy, which she regarded as devilish, she talked of the union of the physical and spiritual worlds, the power of prayer, and the miracles of the early Christians. She told him how the death of her brother had robbed her life of happiness, and that in the hope of seeing him once more she had often spent a long time in prayer and meditation beside his grave at night. And she also gave the Grand Cophta to understand that she counted on him to gratify this desire.

" . . . Cagliostro evaded the request. His great gifts, he explained, were only to be exercised for the good of the world, and if he used them merely for the gratification of idle curiosity, he ran the risk of losing them altogether, or of being destroyed by evil spirits, who were on the watch to take advantage of the weakness of such as he."

This writer further points out that as the exhibitions that he had given her father and uncle of his powers (and which exhibitions contained mere tricks of sleight of hand) were conducted purely for the benefit of idle curiosity, the Countess had not unnaturally reproached him with having exposed himself to the snares of the evil spirits he was so afraid of. "Whereupon the unfortunate Grand Cophta, in his desire to reform Freemasonry and

to spread his gospel of regeneration, having left the straight and narrow path of denunciation for the broad road of compromise, sought to avoid the quagmire to which it led by taking the bypath of double dealing". There is something refreshingly bold about the author's metaphor, but does it altogether represent the facts even as we know them?

If, as the author suggests, (and I find myself inclined to agree with him) the séance in which the little Von Medem had acted as medium were genuine, then why should Cagliostro, if indeed he were an honest man, feel himself compelled to resort to trickery to gratify desires that by other means he could not gratify? Even the most distinguished surgeon, full of confidence in his ability to put right some bodily fault, would not feel that his reputation would suffer by his admitting his own inability to replace an amputated limb. What Cagliostro had achieved at that séance with the little *pupille* was wonderful enough in all conscience; why then could he not have explained that even his great powers were limited, or dependent on conditions not always within his control? Mr. Trowbridge suggests that Cagliostro's trickeries were rendered inevitable by the pestering of the Von Medems, and that, had he not gratified their desire for signs and wonders, he would not have been able to recruit them as members of his new faith. Heavens, what a theory! Does Mr. Trowbridge seriously affirm that the honest preacher of an honest faith would consider his teaching justified by the recruiting adherents who had been impelled to give lip service to him by means of his own fraudulent behaviour? If an honest man could do this, then that man were either a madman or an imbecile.

No, the Count possessed certain super-normal powers. Either by himself or through those others, in whom, by hypnotism, he released the repressed subliminal mind, he could find the power of clairvoyance or prevision. But—and this is an important but—he knew very well what he was doing when he informed the Von Medem brothers of the existence of the treasure, and he knew even better what he was doing when he told Elise von der Recke that his spirit guide Hanachiel had informed him that the Countess stood a reasonable chance of being granted her wish. The immediate object of these trickeries (assuming that he was not capable of hypnotising the Countess into her seeing her brother) was in securing the support of the powerful Von Medem family. Cagliostro, whatever else he was, was a climber, and he believed in rising on the stepping stones of dead brothers to higher things. What the real aim of all his activities was we shall, perhaps, never know. It may be that he was endeavouring to form some organisation of which he should be the chief. People have preached new doctrines before. They preach them today. They will preach them tomorrow. And all these preachers of doctrines draw money for their kindness in pointing out to mankind better ways of living so that the means more than justifies the end. What it would seem that Cagliostro had in mind was a definite time-table of progress, a time-table that took him along a clearly planned route. When next he moved on, he went to St. Petersburg, a place even more splendid than Paris than was Paris more splendid than Mittau; he went on with introductions to the highest Russian nobility; and when he left Petersburg for Warsaw he was not lacking in introductions to the



nobility of that city; introductions which had also been supplied by his obliging Courland hosts. So that there was every reason why he should have gone out of his way to oblige the Countess, and why he should not have been over-scrupulous in the means used for that obliging.

To return to Mittau: the Count handled Countess Elise with considerable skill. Where he impressed the male members of her House with the puerile tricks of the drawing-room conjurer, he instilled a respect for himself in Elise by more subtle means. He adopted an air of mystery, and absented himself for long periods, during which he was supposed to be communing with his spirit guide. It was after such an absence that he brought her the good news of Hanachiel's willingness to consider her request, received by Cagliostro through the spirit. In the meanwhile the Marshal and Count von Medem were growing impatient to discover the hidden treasure. Both the Marshal and his brother shared that distinguishing mark of the very rich, that they were always willing to add to their money. Accordingly, the two Von Medems, together with their sister, who was there at Cagliostro's request, set out with Alessandro for the Von Medem estate, Alt-Auz, near Wilzen. One wonders what it was that the Count expected to find? Had he, in truth, persuaded himself of the existence of such a treasure? Or was he relying on the truth of that peasant story, which may well have come to his ears? Or was he merely taking the Von Medems to a spot in which he had had the prudence to bury a considerable quantity of treasure? The outlay, even if it had run to some hundreds of ducats, would not have been excessive in view of the services that he required the

Von Medems to render him. The London trip had cost him three thousand pounds, and while his meeting with O'Reilly was certainly one of the luckiest things that had ever happened to him, even so it could not have been said that that money had been spent to the best advantage. Knowing, both from my readings and from having met some of the Count's modern successors, something of the character of the man, I incline towards the supposition that it was to a rendezvous with his own buried treasure that Count Alessandro di Cagliostro was taking his dupes. For it does not seem possible to me that the Count, foolish though he may have been at times, would risk the disappointment that the Von Medems must surely have experienced when the treasure was found not to be there. Even had they still trusted the Count, they must have felt that his heavenly friend had had him on toast.

I think, then, that when that little journey (remember that at Cagliostro's especial request the Countess Elise came too) was undertaken, Cagliostro was in no doubt that his prophecy would be fulfilled.

Arrived at the site of the treasure, Cagliostro, taking a little red book from his pocket, opened it and began to read aloud in an unknown tongue. The Countess, whose mind seems to have been turned by her religious exercises, imagined that the Count was praying, and as they moved around, seeking the precise spot under which the treasure lay concealed, interrupted him, which interruption caused the Count to bellow, "O Great Architect of the Universe, help me to accomplish this work!"

Unfortunately, that wild prayer would seem to have been dictated by a very real necessity, for the

long and the short of it is—assuming my theory concerning the planting of the gold to be correct—that Cagliostro had been betrayed by the weakness of his memory. Eager as were those greedy Von Medem brothers to fall to with mattock and shovel, the Count was unable to give the word, for the simple reason that he could not find the marks on the trees, or whatever other mnemonic assistance he had employed to tell him where the treasure lay. Doubtless shaken, but still keeping a cool head, he retired behind a tree, to commune, as he said, with the spirit Hanachiel, but doubtless to concentrate and to collect his scattered wits. Yet, try as he would, he could not remember where he had buried the money; he was unfamiliar with the country, and in the deepening twilight one spot looked very much like another. He gave it up, and returned to his companions, assuring them solemnly that a new complication had arisen, in that Hanachiel had just warned him of the presence of a band of demons, numerous and highly malicious, who would have to be exorcised before the treasure could be removed in safety. In order to prevent the said demons from carting it off before the Count returned on the morrow, Alessandro said a little incantation, the object of which was to bind Hanachiel to mount guard over the demons.

Cagliostro's next move convinces me that he had buried some treasure. For, had he not done so, why should he, unless he were a lunatic, risk once again the evil consequences of disappointing the Von Medems? For consider what he did: the next day, using the small Von Medem as his *pupille*, Cagliostro held a séance. The child was given to hold a large iron nail, and a biographer rightly draws our

attention to the 'strong family resemblance to Mesmer's *baquet divinatoire*'. Between the child and the other members of the party, among whom was Countess Elise, Cagliostro placed a thin silk screen. The child, then, having been hypnotised by Cagliostro, described in detail the spot under which the treasure was buried, the nature of the treasure itself, the number and fearsome aspect of the demons who guarded it, and the seven angels in long white robes who helped Hanachiel to keep an eye on the guardians of the treasure. The Countess von der Recke then describes how, at the Count's command, the little child kissed, and was kissed by, these same white-robed angels. To her amazement, the Countess adds, with commendable understatement, for, although but a thin silk screen separated her from the child, the sound of kissing could distinctly be heard by all the company.

For eight days the séances continued at Alt-Auz, eight days during which, it is to be presumed, the Count did himself very well with those three divinely dedicated bottles always on the table. Sometimes the Countess assisted at these séances, but more often not, for although in one way she was impressed—a little thought-reading experiment seems to have gone remarkably well—she could not overcome her strong disapproval of activities condemned by the whole body of Christian theologians. The result was that as her admiration for, and belief in, Cagliostro's occult powers strengthened, so her fear of his unnatural associates developed. It seems tragic that the one person whom Cagliostro was at such pains to impress should have turned out to be one of his more lamentable failures. For the harder he tried to make

a good impression on Elise, the more did her initial admiration turn into a shuddering disgust. One wonders if perhaps the Count had not fallen in love with Elise, who was beautiful and barely five-and-twenty years of age. That may be the explanation of the strange obstinacy with which he pursued a course that to any man not blinded by infatuation must have revealed itself as the very opposite to that dictated by prudent self-interest.

But continue he did in his efforts to impress the Countess. He liked over much to hear the sound of his own voice, and if the Von Medems were going to enjoy the séances that he provided, they were not going to get out of listening to the lectures with which it was his habit to end these little ceremonies; "lectures which were a strange mixture of sublimity and frivolity". It was by means of these lectures that he finally put his foot in it so far as Elise was concerned. For one day, having talked at some length upon that curious passage in Genesis which talks of the coming down of the Sons of God to wed the daughters of man, Cagliostro added his own gloss, explaining to his audience that such miscegenation had occurred in the past and would doubtless occur again when, Egyptian Masonry having fulfilled its noble function, mankind should become regenerate. This was bad enough, but his folly carried him too far when he assured his audience that "not only the demi-gods of Greece, and Christ of Nazareth, but he himself were the fruit of such unions", an unorthodox point of view which found no sympathetic response in the prejudiced mind of the Countess von der Recke. Only once more did the Countess attend a séance. At first she declined to listen to the Count again, but her

father having requested her to attend, she made one of the company a few days later. This séance, however, was to be the last distinguished by the presence of Elise, for this time, instead of talking of unnatural unions, the Count touched on the more understandable but hardly less palatable natural unions, of which the Countess had had none too happy an experience. When Alessandro then turned to an academic consideration of love-potions and aphrodisiacs, the Countess, now convinced that the Count was a most wicked man, rose abruptly and left the room.

True, Cagliostro made, as one would expect, some efforts to regain the esteem of the Countess; and to some extent, seeing that he was a man of very persuasive manner, he succeeded. But he knew that he could never regain the Countess's trust and esteem, and wisely he decided that the time had come for him to embark on the next stage of his journey. He decided to go to that refuge of all charlatans, St. Petersburg, and that he had not forfeited the esteem of the rest of the Von Medem family may be gathered from the consternation with which the Von Medems, Marshal and Count, received his decision to leave them. When they realised that his mind was made up, although we may be sure that they did not realise why, they showed their appreciation of Alessandro by loading him with the most splendid presents. From one brother he received a gift of eight hundred ducats, from the other a very valuable diamond ring. It is curious, in passing, to note how often the major episodes of Cagliostro's life are marked by the presence of diamonds. Five years afterwards, the Countess von der Recke, having pondered long over her disillusionment, met with a certain Bode, who had once

been a member of the Order of Strict Observance, leaving them in order to join the Illuminati; and on the advice of this Bode wrote her recollections of the Count, which are a strange mixture of tribute and denunciation. The value of Bode's help in the preparation of these memoirs is considerably lessened by the fact that Cagliostro left the Illuminati, taking with him recruits for his own special Freemasonry, and was thus a rival of Bode's, who was friendly with Weishaupt, Founder Illuminist. However, one episode from the Countess's Memoirs may be given here which would seem to testify to the Count's having gone, as some people say he did, to visit the Count de St. Germain. A little while before Cagliostro left for St. Petersburg, he attended a Court function, and observing that the Duchess of Courland was wearing some large and fine pearls, declared that he recognised them as some which had once belonged to his wife, and that, by a secret process, he had increased in size so that he might sell them on behalf of a destitute friend. Countess Elise then asked him if he would do the same with some pearls of hers. The Count declined. It would take too long, he said; nor would he take them with him to Russia, as the Countess asked him. Told by one who was his declared enemy, this curious story provides a memorable vindication of the Count's honesty. He was a rogue; there is no doubt of that; but the sneak thief of the Palermo gutters had long since vanished when the splendid Count di Cagliostro left for the Court of the Czarina of all the Russias.

## XVI

WITH Cagliostro's departure for St. Petersburg the historian is once more faced with the necessity of taking refuge in surmise, seeing that such accounts as he possesses of Cagliostro's actions in the Russian capital are to be found in the writings of those who not only were declared enemies of the Count, but who did not commit their opinions to paper until after the Count had been 'exposed' at Paris in the affair of the diamond necklace. Thus we have to rely on the anonymous author of *Cagliostro Démasqué à Varsovie en 1780*; the Countess von der Recke; the Marquess de Luchet, a biographer of the most doubtful authenticity; and others of less importance, though hardly of less maliciousness. The only certain evidence that we have concerning the reception that Cagliostro received in St. Petersburg is the evidence afforded by the fact of Empress Catherine's order that the Countess von der Recke's book on Cagliostro be translated into Russian. This would seem to point to the fact that in St. Petersburg Cagliostro met with a rebuff, although it is only prudent to point out that the Diamond Necklace affair excited so much attention throughout Europe that Catherine may well have had an interest in reading all that concerned Cagliostro; such interest being dictated merely by a lively inquisitiveness and not necessarily by animosity.<sup>1</sup> However, I think we may take it

<sup>1</sup> I should point out, however, that Catherine wrote to Grimm concerning the Count, in the most contemptuous terms



that St. Petersburg was as unlucky a city for the Count as London had proved itself to be and was to have yet another opportunity of proving the same thing. With the reservation that the accounts of Cagliostro's stay in, and departure from, St. Petersburg are extracted from the writings of those who published them after the affair of the Diamond Necklace, let us see what is supposed to have happened to Alessandro after his leaving Mittau.

We know from the Countess von der Recke that Cagliostro departed from Courland enjoying the esteem of the two Von Medem brothers, and that, while he might have forfeited the Countess's own esteem as a man who preferred intercourse with demons to intercourse with God, yet she had not arrived then at the conclusion that she would appear to have reached a lustrum later, that he was a rogue. This is clearly proved by her offering to entrust him with her pearls, unless we assume the somewhat far-fetched possibility that she was seeking to trap him, an action much out of keeping, I feel, with what we know of her character.

Thus he arrived in St. Petersburg armed with the Von Medems' introductions to the highest Russian nobility. His first act was, of course, to make contact with the Lodge of Strict Observance in that city. It is said that in order to make easier his task of converting the Brothers of that Order to an observance of his own Egyptian Rite, he had recourse to fraud, and thereby effectively destroyed all chances of establishing his credit with the Russians. The story that is told of his failure concerns one of his séances, for which he was unable to procure the usual child medium. As this young person was not immediately

available, Cagliostro, so the story runs, asked the niece of an actress to oblige him by playing the part of medium. In front of the medium he placed a carafe of water, and after having gazed into this, the medium astonished the assembled company by telling them of the wonders that she had seen enacted in the sphere of glass. Cagliostro then, delighted with the good results that he had obtained with this obliging amateur, addressed the converts-to-be on the advantages to be expected from adherence to his new doctrine. Things seemed to be going very well for Egyptian Masonry, when a bomb-shell was thrown in the shape of the young lady's coolly announcing that the whole séance had been a fraud, and that far from having seen anything in the carafe of water, she had merely repeated what the Count had paid her to memorise. It will be understood that all hopes of establishing Egyptian Masonry among the Slavs was gone with that shattering exposure, and some proof of the validity of the tale may most likely be discerned in the fact that St. Petersburg is the only city in which Cagliostro failed to establish one of his Egyptian Lodges. On the other hand, the writer would like to point out that the carafe of water has a significance which would seem to have escaped other writers on Cagliostro. The significance is this: spherical bottles with short necks, of clear glass and filled with pure water, had long been used by watch-makers, lacemakers and others, as condensing lenses. Filled completely with water, tightly corked and stuck into sconces, these focused the light from candles, in the days before the Argand lamp was invented, and provided an intensity of illumination most necessary to those engaged on delicate work at night. Now,

it is a well known fact that auto-hypnosis may be induced by the steady regard of some bright object, especially a pinpoint of light. It may be, therefore, although I am advancing this merely as a suggestion, that Cagliostro was innocent of the fraud, seeing that he had placed an hypnotic agent in front of the young woman, and that it was his enemies who had worked this disastrous trick upon him. We must not forget that there had been considerable opposition among the members of the Strict Observance Lodge at Mit-tau to his founding an Egyptian Lodge, and that such opposition was overcome only by Cagliostro's converting the Marshal von Medem and the Marshal's brother to his own beliefs.

However, as I say, we have only the most biased accounts of Cagliostro's St. Petersburg days to go by, and thus one reason for his leaving is as good as another. Some historians have it that Cagliostro posed as a Colonel in the Service of His Most Catholic Majesty, and adopted the resounding title of the Prince de Santa Cruz, upon which M. de Normandez, the Spanish chargé d'affaires, instituted enquiries into the credentials of Colonel the Prince, and the result of such enquiries was the expulsion of Cagliostro from St. Petersburg. I mention this story in order to show how the malice of Alessandro's enemies took no account of probability, for Cagliostro, warmly recommended by the Von Medem brothers to the highest circles of the Russian Court, would hardly have been likely to have renounced the title of Cagliostro, by which he was introduced, for that of Santa Cruz, of which no one had heard. Another account has it that it was through the enmity of Catherine's two Scottish physicians that Cagliostro

was forced to leave. This tale, if not true, is at least possible, for Cagliostro would appear, after his setback at that séance of the Egyptian Rite, to have sought to regain his prestige by his 'healing' art.

The Marquess de Luchet suggests a similar story to the one concerning the Spanish prince, only in the Marquess's story the Colonelcy was Prussian, and the man responsible for Cagliostro's expulsion was Count von Goertz, the Prussian Minister. De Luchet adds that the immediate cause of the exposure, in this case, was Cagliostro's paying a debt of five thousand louis by bills drawn on a Prussian bank. The Inquisition-Biographer, as may well be imagined, concentrates most of his venom on Cagliostro's adventures as a healer. Faith-healers have always received particularly short shrift at the hands of the Roman Church, which sees, in such amateur attempts, an impudent usurpation of the Church's own monopoly. This biographer tells us that the bald, the deaf and the blind who came to Cagliostro for relief left him with their condition but aggravated. All that we know, really, about this Russian trip is that it was unsuccessful; we may not even affirm with confidence that the Count left the Russian dominions in disgrace, for he arrived in Warsaw bearing letters of introduction from Mittau to exalted personages in Poland, and such introductions appear to have been forwarded on by the Von Medems *after* Cagliostro had arrived in St. Petersburg; indeed, had been residing there for some time. Another biographer calls attention to the fact that both Courland and Warsaw were in the very closest touch with the Russian Court, although he does not add that Warsaw had almost become a Russian city, and that Courland was about

to be incorporated into the realm of Catherine the Great. He points out that it is unlikely—I would say impossible—that Cagliostro's humiliating exposure could have remained hidden from the Von Medems had such exposure truly occurred. And if one should argue that the infatuation of the Von Medems was so great that their faith might remain proof even against this shock, I would point out that among the Von Medems was one whose faith in the Count was already destroyed, and who was even then in the process of becoming one of Alessandro's severest critics. By themselves the Von Medem brothers might have retained their confidence in the Count, even after having heard the story of his unmasking: is it likely that that confidence had remained unimpaired with Elise daily making comment on the fraud? I think not; indeed, I know it.

At any rate, the Cagliostros (Seraphina seems to have joined the Count at some place between London and St. Petersburg) arrived in Warsaw, apparently somewhat short of ready cash, but armed with introductions to Prince Adam Ponianski and Count Mocinski. From their reception in the Polish capital one may judge that either Warsaw had not yet heard of the unmasking, or that it had decided, out of enmity for Russia, to accept the man whom the Russians had expelled. Certain it is that Ponianski welcomed the two strangers bearing the Von Medems' letters of introduction. He seems to have been as great an adept of the occult as were the Von Medem brothers, and he so far practised the Masonic principle of brotherly love in that he invited the Count and Countess to stay at his house.

With such an auspicious beginning to his stay in Poland, it is not surprising that Cagliostro succeeded very quickly in converting the Prince to a belief in the

Egyptian Rite. In less than a month after Alessandro's arrival in Warsaw a lodge of Egyptian Masonry had been founded.

Unfortunately, if we are to believe the unfavourable accounts of Cagliostro's life in Warsaw (I shall deal with the one favourable account later) the principles of Egyptian Masonry stirred the interest of Cagliostro's prospective converts less than did the chance of seeing those wonders that popular rumour claimed for Cagliostro the ability to perform. Just as the Von Medems had been more interested in Cagliostro's séances, so was the Prince less interested in moral regeneration than in the secrets of metallic transmutation, which secret he had sought in his laboratory for years. Faced with the necessity of obliging the Prince, Cagliostro resorted to trickery in order to satisfy his convert (with what an incredibly weak mind his traducers have credited the Count!). Unfortunately for Alessandro, he had not mastered the technique of fraudulent alchemical experiments, and being invited to transmute some lead into gold in the presence of a company of Polish alchemists, his trick was so clumsily executed that the imposition was instantly detected. The pamphlet, *Cagliostro Unmasked at Warsaw in 1780* was published in 1786. That is to say, six years after the events that it is supposed to describe, and one year after Cagliostro's appearance as a principal in the affair of the Diamond Necklace. Its authenticity is open to doubt by another reason: it is anonymous, being signed merely 'Count M.', although the titular Count claims to have been an eye-witness of Cagliostro's 'unmasking' and thus calls as witness an anonymity. Such evidence would not be admitted in even the most biased court of law; its admission

in any impartial historical work must be subject, therefore, to the greatest reservation. On the other hand, the evidence given by Madame Boehmer during Cagliostro's subsequent trial, accords, in sentiment at least, with the account of the anonymous writer of the pamphlet. This is what Madame Boehmer said. She was talking of a dinner party at which the Countess de Lamotte was present. We shall see more of the Countess later, when she will have become one of the Count's bitterest enemies. At this time, however, she would appear to have been an admirer, if not of the Count, then at least of his doctrines; for Madame Boehmer said that the talk turned on Mesmerism, and that Madame Boehmer declared that she did not believe in it. The Countess de Lamotte affirmed that she did. Recalling this conversation, here is Madame Boehmer's comment:

"Such people only wish to attract attention, just as Cagliostro, who has been driven out of every country in which he has tried to make gold. The last was Poland. A person who has just come from there told me that he was admitted to Court on the strength of his knowledge of the occult, particularly of the philosopher's stone. There were some, however, who were not to be convinced without actual proof. Accordingly, a day was set for the experiment, and one of the incredulous courtiers, knowing that he had as an assistant a young girl, bribed her." (Madame Boehmer's suggestion that this may have been the Countess Cagliostro must be dismissed with contempt.) "'Keep your eye,' said the girl to the courtier, 'on his thumb, which he holds in the palm of his hand to conceal the piece of gold that he will slip into the crucible.' All attention, the courtier heard the gold fall, and,

immediately seizing Cagliostro's hand, exclaimed to the King, 'Sire, didn't you hear?' The crucible was searched, and a small lump of gold was found, whereupon Cagliostro was instantly and very roughly, as I was told, flung out of the Palace."

If we may believe these unfavourable accounts, Alessandro was certainly lacking in dexterity. The pamphleteer affirms that he was called upon to pass an examination in alchemy, and dismisses contemptuously Cagliostro's pretensions to have mastered this art. The Pole exclaims: "If only he had known a little more of optics, accoustics, mechanics, and physics generally; if he had studied a little more the tricks of Comus and Philadelphus, what success might he not have had! He should add to the trivial secrets that he possesses by reading some good book of chemistry." Now for the favourable account, concerning which it is important to point out that, firstly, it is not anonymous; secondly, it is signed by a man of position; and thirdly, it is dated but a year after the events described in it: three advantages that other accounts do not possess. I leave the reader to draw his own conclusions. The account occurs in a letter written by Laborde, Farmer-General of France, in 1781. Laborde was in Warsaw at the same time as Cagliostro was visiting that city, and he testifies to the fact that Cagliostro did indeed have the honour of being presented to King Stanislaus Augustus. According to Laborde, the king, after having met the Count, was expressing his admiration for Cagliostro's wonderful powers, when a young lady of the Court laughingly exclaimed that the Count, in her opinion, was no more than an impostor, and that should the Count and she meet she would challenge the Count to tell her of certain



hidden things in her life. This challenge was conveyed to the Count by the King, and was received—quite understandably, in the circumstances—coldly enough by Cagliostro. Nevertheless, he agreed to meet the young lady and satisfy her curiosity, which he did so fully that she was converted instantly from a profound scepticism to an immoderate enthusiasm for the powers of the Count. In her excessive credulity, she begged the Count to tell her, since he had informed her of all that had happened, what should befall her. This request the Count received with what all observed to be a marked distaste. However, he was at Court, and his reluctance to oblige the young lady served, naturally, only to whet the inquisitiveness of the young lady herself and all others who were present. “Very well then!” said Cagliostro, and he proceeded to tell the young lady that she would soon make a long journey, in the course of which her carriage would meet with an accident, and that while she would be waiting for the repairs to be made, the manner in which she would be dressed would rouse the crowd to pelt her with apples. From there she would go to a famous spa, where she would meet a man of high birth whom shortly afterwards she would marry. The Count added that there would be an attempt to prevent that marriage, which attempt would cause the young lady to be foolish enough to make over to her prospective husband her entire fortune. Cagliostro further added that the young lady would be married in a city in which the Count would be at the same time, and that the young lady, knowing this, would endeavour to see him, but without success. He gave her a talisman, urging her to wear it always in order to ward off misfortune, warning her that the

loss of it would bring down troubles upon her head.

Laborde adds most prudently that while he could not guarantee either the truth or the falsity of this story, he had it on the authority of many persons, including the lady herself and Cagliostro, that events had turned out to be exactly as the Count had predicted.

On June 26th, 1780, Cagliostro left Warsaw; according to all those stories which were published after his trial, five years later: a disgraced man. On September 19th, 1780, he made his entry into Strasbourg as a visitor, not only honoured, but eagerly awaited. The whole city turned out to greet this wonder-working nobleman, the fame of whose charity and miracles had filled all the citizens with an overpowering desire to see the man of whom rumour had published such astonishing reports.

It will doubtless occur to the reader to wonder what art or happy chance had been responsible for the rehabilitation of the Count's name during those few months which had elapsed between his leaving Warsaw and his coming to Strasbourg. The answer to the query may perhaps lie in the fact that he had not left Warsaw a man quite so disgraced as his traducers afterwards claimed to have been the case.

Mystery again! Once more a curious gap concerning which we have only rumoured stories. The Inquisition-Biographer, this time telling a plausible tale, affirms that he stopped at Frankfort-on-the-Main in order there to confer with, and take his orders from, Knigge, one of the leading members of the Illuminist Order. This was at a time when both Cagliostro and Knigge were members in common of the Order of Strict Observance, and both men would seem to have been pursuing their respective objects

of making stronger the Illuminist and Egyptian Sects while retaining their original membership of the Order of Strict Observance. I have mentioned that some years afterwards Cagliostro was attacked by Bode on the grounds that he had taken members away from Illuminism for the benefit of his own Order, but at the time of Cagliostro's leaving Warsaw it would seem that neither Knigge nor the Count considered membership of any other order incompatible with membership of the Order of Strict Observance. Indeed, just as today, the eighteenth-century Mason felt himself free to belong to a number of Orders, provided that none was in discord with the others. It would seem that if Cagliostro did not visit Frankfort and see Knigge, he must have visited someone equally powerful, and equally disposed to render Alessandro assistance. For there is no doubt that at some period within those three months which elapsed between Warsaw and Strasbourg Cagliostro received some very great help. Not only did he arrive in Strasbourg obviously wealthy, but friends had been warned in that city to welcome him in a manner befitting the importance of the man, and of the Order to which he belonged. The Inquisition-Biographer states definitely that Cagliostro was received into the Illuminist Order at Frankfort, and further makes the statement that the oath that the Count took bound him to assist in the overthrow of the French crown and the Papacy. Short of being permitted to examine the archives of the Illuminists, the historian must accept such statements with reserve. All that he can affirm is that Cagliostro arrived in Strasbourg on September 19th, 1780, to receive such acclamation of the populace as ordinarily is reserved for kings, and popular ones at that.

## XVII

WE now perceive that a change in tactics has been adopted by the Count. His ostentation is as great—he drove across the Pont de Kohl in a carriage of surpassing magnificence, dressed in a blue coat covered with gold bullion and precious stones, and wearing his long hair caught up in a net of gold thread. But now, rather than present his letters of introduction to the highest personages in Strasbourg society, he drives through the cheering crowds to a small tobacconist's, whose shop was in the least pretentious part of the city. M. Quère, having been warned, had prepared a couple of rooms for his distinguished guests, and from this modest lodging the Count embarked on his campaign as healer of the sick of Strasbourg. Mr. Trowbridge draws from this change of style the conclusion that Cagliostro had lost the support of the rich and the powerful, but I cannot follow him in this. He affirms that “having lost the influence of the great, by means of whom he had counted to establish Egyptian Masonry, he was anxious to secure that of the masses”. No doubt he was; but whence had the money come by which Cagliostro was enabled to embark on his free treatment of the sick poor? I incline, as does Mr. Trowbridge, to the theory that at Frankfort or at some other centre of Illuminism, Cagliostro was entrusted with a definite commission, and that commission was to popularise Illuminism with the masses; for although

it has not yet been proved that Cagliostro's Egyptian Masonry was revolutionary in principle or practice, there is no doubt that Illuminism, under the control of such men as Weishaupt, Bode and Knigge, most certainly was. Surely it is not too fanciful to suppose something like this: Cagliostro is invited by Knigge to meet the Grand Council of the Illuminists in order to consider a proposition that they shall presently put forward. The Council says to him, in effect: "Look here, Count, you have succeeded in establishing your Lodges in most of the principal cities of Europe, and the principles of Masonry are pretty well disseminated throughout the nobility and upper classes of the Continent. What has not yet been achieved is the roping in of the middle and lower classes, who are still the slaves of reactionary tyrants. We admire your skill in putting over your ideas, otherwise we should not have sent for you. If you would care to consider acting as instructor to the classes whom we want to rope in, we shall see that you don't lose by it. Well, Count, is it a go?"

My point is this: as Cagliostro was obviously subsidised by some interested party, powerful enough to cope even with the Count's notoriously extravagant tastes, then Cagliostro can hardly have lost the support of great and powerful persons. That he did not immediately call upon important personages in Strasbourg does not mean that he had decided to relinquish his acquaintance with the great ones of this world, but that his commission imposed on him primarily the obligation to make the Order of which he was the paid representative popular with the masses. In point of fact, as we shall see later, he had

not for one moment the least intention to abandon his acquaintanceship with important people.

But first of all let us see what happened after he had arrived in Strasbourg and taken lodgings over the tobacconist's.

He caused it to be known that he was willing to give, free of all charge to the recipients, the benefit of his great learning to all as should feel the need of it. This generous offer met with the sort of response which usually greets such offers. Without enquiring into the sincerity or otherwise of his motives, the historian must record that he spared nothing of himself in order to redeem his promise. Even those of his contemporaries who charge him with the least honourable of motives in performing these acts of charity, do not deny that the acts were real enough. They affirm that the Count refused nothing to the poor man who called on his aid, and that he received, at any rate from the poor, no payment for any of those services that he so fully and willingly gave. One of his first acts, on coming to Strasbourg, was to secure the release from prison of an Italian who had been committed for a debt of eight pounds. This debt the Count paid, and in addition, replenished the debtor's wardrobe, sending the man away with a present of money.

On the other hand, there is a story that the Count might well afford to give away his money and perform his charitable actions without monetary recompense, seeing that Madame la Comtesse was making quite a nice thing out of a little racket that she was running. Seraphina was now twenty-five, at that age when women of her country are at the finest bloom of their maturity; when youth is passed, but age is not yet

here. If we accept the story of the Countess's business as correct, then there is every reason why the Count should have gone to considerable lengths in order to establish his reputation as the master of secrets of health and life unknown to the Academy of Sciences. The trick, like all the best tricks of this world, was simple: all Seraphina, young, slim and divinely beautiful, had to do, was to talk, with a mother's loving pride, of her son, who had just been given his Company in the Dutch Army.

"But, Madame la Comtesse," exclaimed some enamelled old hag, "surely your son is too young a child to be in the Army, let alone a captain!"

"Oh!" Seraphina would reply, with artless candour, "he is twenty-eight."

Little more was necessary in order to sell a bottle of the Count's elixir of life. The old bought it in order to restore their vanished youth; the young in order to ward off age as successfully as had done this astonishing woman, who looked no more than twenty-five, and whose son was nearly thirty. This is one of the best tricks, for, as all of us grow old, and nearly all of us respect our youth only when it is too late to enjoy it, there is always a plentiful supply of mugs.

Be that as it may, the Countess has not been accused of any less honourable ways of supporting herself and her husband. The shameful allegations which have been made concerning Cagliostro's complacency in the early days of his married life at Rome, find no echo in the accounts of his Strasbourg period, nor do we hear of any exposures. If we may still continue to regard him as a trickster—and even this begins to look less reasonable than it did when we saw him at Warsaw—we must admit that he had



[Kischgitz Studios]

PRINCE LOUIS DE ROHAN  
CARDINAL ARCHBISHOP OF STRASBOURG





now mastered the technique of imposture sufficiently to guard himself against the malice of the ill-willed. The accounts that we have of those days, even those written by persons not friendly towards him, testify to the astonishing effect made upon the people of Strasbourg, high and low, by the wonders that he performed. Concerning the nature and validity of his cures the historian is forced to be silent; he must refrain from being seduced into enthusiasm by the testimony of the Count's admirers or into denunciation by the witness of the Count's enemies. We know now more of the intimate relation between mind and body than was generally known in those days, and such of the faith-healers of the past who were successful were successful, less from the possession of any supernatural power, than from a knowledge, not commonly shared by the mass of their contemporaries, of the psychoanalytical treatment of neuroses. There is no reason why Cagliostro should not have been as admirable a practitioner in the art of faith-healing as have been so many others before and after his time.

Cagliostro's activities in what, for want of a better term, we may call "occult" practices, would seem to have been confined, during the days of his stay at Strasbourg, to thought-reading, clairvoyance and kindred exhibitions of his extra-sensory perception. There appears to be no question that what he set out to do he achieved magnificently, and soon the whole countryside was filled with reports of the skill of the miracle worker. Even sceptics, who attended his lectures with the express purpose of exposing him as a fraud, came away, if not convinced, then at least baffled; but this writer remembers having seen, as a

very young man, the music-hall turn called The Zancigs, whose 'thought reading' act was no less miraculous and convincing than anything we know the Count to have achieved. Blindfolded, the lady partner in this turn would sit on the stage, while the gentleman would move about the audience in the dimly lit theatre, receiving objects which were absolutely unfamiliar to him: articles of personal use, many of them engraved with the monogram of the owner. I never heard him call out to his partner but the one phrase, "What have I here?" and I never knew the blindfolded lady many yards away to fail to give an accurate description of the object, even to the describing such initials or other decoration upon it. And yet the Zancigs confessed openly that these marvels were achieved by means of a trick.

So that, even if the reports given by those the most convinced are true, there is no reason to credit Cagliostro with the possession of more than natural powers, although it is harder to account for such uncompromising prophecies as that that he made concerning the death of the Empress Maria Theresa, a prophecy recorded by the Baroness d'Oberkirch, who was by no means one of the Count's more ardent admirers. According to the Baroness, the prophecy was repeated to her by the Cardinal de Rohan, five days before the news arrived in Strasbourg.

But if the thought-reading séances of Cagliostro (it is interesting to note that, when employing a medium, he still used the carafe) earned him fame, the chief source of the reputation that he was now acquiring as a wonder-worker came from the efficacy of his cures. It is reported that the number of his patients had soon increased to upwards of five hundred

a day, among which were those of the bourgeoisie and upper classes. Hardly a moment now was left to the Count to conduct any other business save that of healer, and it was impossible, once one was in the house, to leave it until the night had come, owing to the press of people who constantly filled every room and corridor and surged about the front door.

Naturally, the fame of this extraordinary man did not remain confined to those circles represented by the common people of Strasbourg. Soon reports of the Count's healing talent came to the ears of the aristocracy, and very soon the aristocracy itself began to repair to the house of Alessandro di Cagliostro. They must, when they got there, have been impressed by the multitudes of crutches and other surgical appliances which had been left by grateful patients no longer in need of these aids. And their experiences, when Cagliostro finally consented to see them, justified the expectations that the sight of the crutches had aroused. The Baron von Gleichen, in his *Memoirs*, reports the case of a remarkable cure: that of the gangrenous leg of the secretary to the Commandant of Strasbourg. Von Gleichen also records the case of a woman, about to be confined, who had been abandoned as hopeless by the midwives. Cagliostro, on being apprised of the woman's condition, went instantly by night, and after having made an examination, promised the woman a successful delivery. It is interesting here to note that Cagliostro gave Von Gleichen his reasons for having made this promise, and it would seem, on the face of it, that Cagliostro relied, as all good physicians do rely, on the experience that comes from observation, and the power of observation that experience alone may bring. Von

Gleichen says that Cagliostro confessed to him that his promise had been somewhat rash; optimistic, let us say. But Cagliostro had been convinced, by feeling the pulse of the umbilical cord, that the child itself was in perfect health, and that the whole difficulty of the case was the lack of strength in the mother. The mother was too weak to bring the child into the world. To overcome this difficulty, Cagliostro said, he had relied on the power of a singularly soothing remedy with which he was acquainted, adding that the result, in his opinion, had been due more to luck than to skill. Medical men will feel inclined to admit that a man who makes so accurate a prognosis may credit himself with quite as much skill as luck, and may see in the details of this accouchement an anticipation of Sir James Hope Simpson's historical chloroform-delivery, and of the modern technique of 'twilight sleep'.

There were others in Strasbourg for whom the Count performed cures as striking, but the cure which brought him most renown, and set the seal on his reputation as a healer, was the cure of the Prince de Soubise, a cousin of the Cardinal Prince de Rohan who was afterwards to have such a profound influence on the course of Cagliostro's own career. The Prince was suffering from one of those indefinable illnesses from which sufferers of the eighteenth-century seem to have died. All that we know of the Prince's illness is that he had been given up by the doctors, a condition apparently supervening earlier in the course of an eighteenth-century malady than is the case today. At any rate, according to the physicians, the Prince had not an earthly chance of surviving the course of his illness, and in despera-

tion, the Cardinal swept Cagliostro off to Paris in his coach, introducing him incognito into his cousin's bedroom, announcing simply that he had brought with him another doctor. Considering that everything that might have been done had been done, there was no object in refusing this last doctor permission to experiment on the condemned man. Consenting to treat the dying Prince, Cagliostro requested all others to leave the room, and it will never be known what transpired between doctor and patient. All that we do know is, that after the interval of a few minutes, Cagliostro called the Cardinal in and told him that his cousin, provided that the Count's directions were followed exactly, would be out of his bed in two days; driving in his carriage within the week; and within three weeks, able to go to Court. The family did, most punctiliously, follow the Count's directions, and the patient made a recovery even more rapid than that predicted for him by the Count. It would seem to be true that no one in the Hôtel de Soubise, save, of course, the Cardinal, knew the identity of the doctor; nor was that identity made known until after the Prince de Soubise had recovered his complete health.

It may be imagined that this cure, both from the dramatic circumstances of its effecting, and the high position of the patient, created an extraordinary furore. Baroness d'Oberkirch says that it would be impossible to give an idea of the passion, the madness, with which people pursued him. Ladies of rank and fashion, all the society of Strasbourg, turned out to see this man, and people now thronged about him, even those who were in perfect health, so as to gratify the curiosity aroused by the tales of his achievements,

and feast their eyes on the person of this modern magician.

In considering the validity of these cures, the historian invites the reader to remember what was said previously concerning Mesmer, and to consider what we now know concerning the indissoluble bond between mind and body. Mesmer achieved cures as undeniable as those worked by Cagliostro, and both must surely have realised, early in their careers as healer, that the human mind, if it is to be asked to heal the body in which it is, must receive some sacramental stimulus in the shape of a material counterpart to what it is being urged mentally and spiritually to achieve for itself. Thus it is possible to say that Mesmer was no charlatan simply because he used his *baquet*, seeing that, although the *baquet* was simply an arrangement of water-filled bottles and iron rods, the minds of his patients would not have exerted themselves on their own behalf had those minds not been stimulated by contact with the material objects provided in the course of treatment. The modern doctor is not contemptuous of the principle involved in these harmless deceptions, and many a person has been relieved from pain by the faith induced in swallowing some coloured water labelled with a Latin name.

There is no doubt that Cagliostro well understood the technique of the faith-healing art, and a biographer brilliantly sums up the situation when he says "miracles can only succeed in an atmosphere favourable to the miraculous".

## XVIII

WITH the technique of mystery Cagliostro would now appear to have decided to develop the technique of mysteriousness. We begin to see for the first time the germs of that character which afterwards he was to make his ordinary standard of behaviour. When he had come to Strasbourg, he had advertised his willingness to treat all who should demand his help, and such advertisement naturally had the effect of bringing him and his personality into contact with a great number of people. The cure of the Prince de Soubise would seem to have reminded him that there was more profit in treating the rich than in treating the poor, although he cannot have been unmindful of the fact that it was through his treatment of the poor that the rich had come to seek him out. But now we perceive the change beginning; the withdrawal into that mysterious privacy from which he was never afterwards wholly to emerge. He begins to be insolent where before he had been deferential, and persons whom he would have been proud to greet in the old days, are now received by him with scant courtesy. The famous Lavater, coming all the way from Zurich in order to have an interview with the Count, barely escapes being shown the door, although it is only fair to add that the great scientist's intentions with regard to Cagliostro may not have flattered that nobleman, who must have thought himself worthy of better things than standing as an anatomical



specimen for the examination of Lavater. Whatever the reason, though, Lavater received short shrift from busy Count. Said Cagliostro: "If your science is the greater than mine, you have no need of my acquaintance; and if mine is the greater, I have no need of yours." There is a ring of the sharpness of the Palermo<sup>a</sup> back-streets in that uncompromising observation.

But the man of science was stronger in Lavater than the man who was unwilling to be snubbed. Overlooking Cagliostro's rudeness, or being possibly piqued by it, Lavater wrote the Count a letter in which the Swiss had the impudence to ask Alessandro how he had acquired his knowledge and in what it consisted. The answer was as ambiguous as it was brief: "In words, in grass, in stones." This ambiguity served Cagliostro badly, so far as the Swiss clergyman was concerned. Having been unimpressed by Cagliostro's physiognomy, his worst fears received confirmation in Cagliostro's brief reply. Off to Zurich went Lavater, telling everyone on the way that Cagliostro was a supernatural being fulfilling a diabolical mission; a verdict which seems, curiously enough, the echo of what Cagliostro himself had told Elise von der Recke.

Doubtless many people believed the Swiss pastor-scientist, and it is not improbable that his report reached the ears of His Eminence the Cardinal Prince Louis René Edouard de Rohan, Archbishop of Strasbourg, Landgrave of Alsace, Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, Grand Almoner of France, Commander of the Order of the Holy Ghost. For that was a man to whom the bizarre character of the Count, together with the curious circumstances of the Count's life, might not fail to make the strongest appeal.

We have already seen how Cagliostro obliged His Eminence in the matter of the Prince de Soubise, but it would appear that the occasion of the Count's accompanying the Cardinal to Paris had not begun a friendship that we know to have been sought by De Rohan. Indeed, the relations between Cardinal and Count may be said to have been characterised by admiration on one side and coldness on the other; for when, soon after Alessandro's arrival in Strasbourg, the Baron de Millinens, the Cardinal's Grand-Veneur, called on the Count with an invitation to visit his master, he received no less uncompromising a reply than that that Lavater had got.

"If the Cardinal is ill, let him come to me, I will cure him; but if he is well, he has no need of me, nor I of him."

This impudent boldness, the reader will not be astonished to learn, succeeded admirably in effecting what, doubtless, Cagliostro wished of it. Soon afterwards, the Cardinal, having attempted in vain to secure an invitation to Cagliostro's house, feigned an attack of asthma, upon which Cagliostro repaired to the archiepiscopal palace.

This was what Cagliostro had been working for ever since he had set out from Frankfort, and that the conquest of the Cardinal had been the prime object of Alessandro's coming to Strasbourg is evident from the way in which the Count played his princely bait. There is too much that smacks of finesse in the Count's persistent rebuffs; too much that savours of the pursuit of a carefully constructed plan; in Cagliostro's haughty rejection of De Rohan's overtures. For, really, there was no reason why Cagliostro should not have accepted the friendship of the Cardinal Prince: he was not

unaccustomed to the society of the great and the highly born; he was, even at that moment, on friendly terms with many of the leading figures of Strasbourg; for in widening his acquaintance with the poor and the humble he had not necessarily severed all connections with the rich and the nobly born. No, in refusing the Cardinal's pressing invitation to accept his friendship, Cagliostro was endeavouring to do what indeed he did: whet the curiosity of this pampered prelate, and increase at the same time his own value in De Rohan's eyes. For, consider: had he really wished not to accept the Cardinal's friendship, there is no reason why he should eventually have accepted it. No pressure was brought to bear on Cagliostro beyond the mild pressure exercised by a stream of equerries bearing invitations to visit the palace. And if the Count decided in the end to gratify the Cardinal's desire and enter the society of the Cardinal's friends, then those early refusals of Cagliostro's can be nothing but the considered scheming of a man who has already, long ago, mapped out the course of his career.

In the end, as I have said, Cagliostro 'gave in', as he had known all along that he would do. Reading now of the Count's grudging acquiescence in the Cardinal's wishes, it seems astonishing that even the folly of a De Rohan could have permitted the Count to conduct himself with so astonishing an insolence. The Cardinal, of one of France's greatest families; young, handsome, distinguished, and rich beyond the dreams of the commissioners of income tax; was one of those legendary characters for whom fortune seems to have reserved all her smiles unmarred by even a ghost of a frown. The Abbey of St. Vaast, of which he was Prior, was the richest in France, and

from it alone he drew a revenue of three hundred thousand livres, or twelve thousand pounds in our money; his total income—within the limits of which he had proved himself quite unable to keep—reached the enormous sum of forty-eight thousand pounds a year. Nor, with his birth, his looks and his riches, was he without pretence to intellectuality. He had, at the age of twenty-seven, been elected a member of the French Academy, and in conversation he is reported to have been as glittering as the most glittering in that century of great conversationalists and wits.

Yet the remark that Cagliostro made to this paragon, when finally accepting the paragon's proffer of his friendship, was this: "Monseigneur, I have decided that I can accept your friendship; your soul is worthy of mine, and I shall confide to you all my secrets." Certainly no one could say fairer than that; and the Cardinal Prince was delighted.

So charmed, in fact, by the impudent assurance of the Italian, that Alessandro received an invitation to treat the Palace as though it were his own home; an invitation that Seraphina, naturally, shared. Safely installed in Saverne, the Count and Countess soon showed that they had forgotten nothing of all those lessons so laboriously mastered. Soon the servants, throwing open the great double doors of the palace, announced the arrival of His Excellency the Count di Cagliostro, and when the Count had come into the room that he had been bidden to consider as no less than his own, it was to be observed that he was received by the Cardinal with all those marks of affection that we usually reserve for such of our friends as are dearest to us.

Cagliostro was unlike the Bourbons, who learnt nothing and forgot nothing, in that he was constantly learning; but his success with the Cardinal Prince would seem to have been derived from the possession of knowledge acquired in the laboratory of Althotas. For we find Cardinal and Count soon busy in the alchemical workshops at Saverne. What went on among the alembics and crucibles and retorts, one can only surmise, but certain it is that the Cardinal, if he was deceived, was deceived with a dexterity that Cagliostro had not—at any rate, according to ‘Count M’—commanded in Warsaw. For, according to Madame d’Oberkirch, the Cardinal affirmed positively that Cagliostro was capable of making diamonds and gold. We have it, on Madame d’Oberkirch’s authority, that the Cardinal was in the habit of wearing a ring, a diamond of great size and of equally great value, which had been made—so the Cardinal asserted—by the Count di Cagliostro. It is on record that the Cardinal told the Baroness that the ring had been appraised by an expert, who had estimated its value at a price not less than five-and-twenty thousand livres. When the Cardinal told the Baroness this fact, he added that Cagliostro had never demanded of De Rohan one penny piece for himself. I quote from the Baroness:

“This is not all—he can make gold.”

The Baroness d’Oberkirch, resisting all efforts of the Count to persuade her that he was what he aspired to be, yet may not resist recording what she knew to be, if not fact, then at least stories accepted as truth by the majority of her contemporaries.

But the suspicious nature of the Baroness could not have had any effect on the Count’s progress. For

every one of people like the Baroness d'Oberkirch there were a hundred like the Cardinal Prince de Rohan. If Alessandro were not able to bring the Baroness to his way of thinking, the loss was not excessive, seeing that such people as the Cardinal were eager to be converted to the Count's creed.

We have seen how His Eminence desired above all to incorporate Alessandro into his own particular society, and we have seen how the Count utilised this desire in order to advance his own aims. It is a matter of history that the Count succeeded admirably in establishing his own desires as a business of the Cardinal's, and we may anticipate the course of the historical narrative by saying that the Count contrived so to ingratiate himself with De Rohan as to secure for himself an invitation to accompany the Cardinal to Paris.

The Abbé Georgel, who was by no means a friend of Alessandro's, testifies to the extraordinary influence that the Count brought to bear on the Cardinal; and others, including Madame d'Oberkirch and Madame du Hausset, testify to the fascination that Cagliostro exercised over his princely patron.

## XIX

IT is to be hoped that the records of Egyptian Masonry, should they still survive,<sup>1</sup> be submitted to the notice of the public, for, unless they be, it will be impossible accurately to indicate what were Cagliostro's aims and actions during the period which elapsed between his leaving Strasbourg and his leaving London. We have seen how, having induced the Cardinal to give Alessandro his support, the Count embarked on the course of action which was to result in all that lamentable series of accidents which were to mark the completion of so fantastic a career.

When Cagliostro left Strasbourg, he left under the protection of one of the most powerful patrons that France could, at that time, have afforded any such person as the Count. Indeed, it was necessary that Cagliostro should discover someone as powerful as the Cardinal, for no one less potent might have afforded the protection that Cagliostro needed. The cures that the Count had effected had not rendered him popular with the orthodox schools of medicine, and Alessandro's ability to cure, where the ordinary practitioner had to admit himself incapable, must necessarily have made his name stink among the medical circles of Strasbourg. The fact that, as Cagliostro confessed to the Baron von Gleichen, Alessandro attributed his own success as a healer to his ability to achieve a precise diagnosis through no

<sup>1</sup> By order of Pope Pius VI, these records were condemned to be burnt.

more than a precise observation, sufficed nothing but to earn him the hatred of those who could not have achieved a precise diagnosis even had they been able to command a precise observation.

Von Gleichen says: "His good fortune, or his knowledge of medicine, excited the hatred and jealousy of the doctors, who, when they persecute, are as dangerous as the priests."

Yet it was not the minds only of the doctors who had been poisoned; it would seem that all but Cagliostro's dearest friends had been rendered envious by the attention that the Cardinal had given to the Italian. It is the privilege of a friend to abuse another friend with impunity, and Cagliostro discovered that his friends were taking advantage of the prerogative of their sort in order to carry tales to the Cardinal. One such tale, recorded by a biographer, concerned the lavishness of the banquet that the Count gave at Saverne in His Eminence's absence. De Rohan was informed that, at these banquets, Tokay flowed like water; but the Cardinal, at whose own banquets Tokay had flowed like the Victoria Falls, only laughed.

And despite these traducers, Cagliostro accompanied His Eminence to Paris. The Cardinal went to his own palatial house, and the Count di Cagliostro took the lease of much less pretentious accommodation in the rue Claude.



## XX

I REMEMBER once reading, as a boy, a remark—I forget now in which work I found it—that the discipline of the Roman legions was never finer than in those years immediately preceding the collapse of the Empire, and it is certain that what we call the civilization of the eighteenth-century in France seemed never so established as in those years immediately anterior to the break-up which occurred at the end of the ninth decade. It still remains for the historian honestly to examine, not the causes of the Revolution—for they are well known—nor yet the actual aspects of the Revolution itself—for they are equally well known—but the state of mind of the people among whom the Revolution originated. For instance, it will be necessary, when the historian decides to embark on this task, to ask himself if he understands the mentality of the Parisian of 1785. It will be easy for him to tell that Danton and Robespierre and Mirabeau and Lafayette and others were working, if not to establish a new social order, then at least a compromise between the old order and that that fate had decreed to follow the old order; but will it be as easy for him to tell what the Parisian—the man walking about the streets—thought in the Paris of 1785? It will be difficult: for, although the immediate changes in social order are effected by the man in the street, the man in the street is not called upon to exercise his undeniable power until the change is almost

effected. The mobs of Vienna and Paris and Petrograd have effected changes in government, but the function of such mobs is properly appreciable when one considers the function of a thread of cotton which, by its trivial weight, is responsible for depressing one of the scales of a balance, both of which are equally weighted with an overabundance. This writer has been the witness of a number of popular crises. He has seen a socialist government elected to power in England, and he has seen a king of England forced to abdicate by a government barely holding a majority of the people's votes. And his own experience teaches him that the people, although subconsciously they may *assist* in change, are never responsible for change itself. They do not know that change is upon them, for the simple reason that they are not aware of the nature of the conditions in which they live. They are 'The People', and their function in life entails an avoidance of knowing. They accept, and acceptance is at once their privilege and their duty. I know, all my readers who may lay claim to the title of 'men of the world' know too, that changes are regulated from above; the people know nothing: if they knew anything the chances are that the changes would not take place.

Thus we may assume that, although the ninth decade of the eighteenth century was pregnant with change, when the Cardinal and Cagliostro arrived in Paris, their eyes saw nothing different in the streets of Paris than had been vouchsafed to the eyes of two travellers arriving in the city fifty, seventy-five, one hundred years before.

And what did they find? They found a city, somewhat like the London of forty years ago; a city, divided

between the vainglorious modern and the unselfconscious out-of-date: a *mélange* of stone modern and lath-and-plaster mediæval. They had seen that before, and the sight cannot have been productive in them of any unusual thoughts.

So much for the purely material aspects of Paris: what of the spirit of that time, as evinced in Parisian life? Well, we have seen that Mesmer had secured the patronage of the Queen. We have recorded how, in order to allow his patients to reap the full benefit of those intrinsic qualities that they knew not they possessed, he had had recourse to all the hocus-pocus of his magnetic rods. We know, although this writer has not heretofore mentioned it, that a certain Swiss painter, Philip de Loutherbourg, had left Paris for London, and that De Loutherbourg had imposed on his patients beliefs even more unusual than those that Mesmer had called upon his to support. Any biographer of Cagliostro cannot avoid the conclusion that Cagliostro knew well the sentiments of that Paris to which he was returning. I do not mean that Cagliostro was gifted with that prescience which told him that a revolution would occur in 1789; he may, or he may not, have known it; what I do mean is that Cagliostro, curiously sensitive, as are all his type, to the changes in popular sentiment, must have realised that he was entering a city whose inhabitants desired more than anything else to be diverted. They wanted entertainment, they wanted something, someone, to take them out of themselves. They wanted, in other words, a change. Life had become too ordinary, too drab; it was necessary that something bizarre, foreign, be introduced into their lives. They wanted their own existences to take on curves as wayward as those

to be found in the rococo mirrors and side-tables and book-plates with which they had become too consciously accustomed.

It was at the invitation of the Cardinal that Cagliostro went to Paris. The Count had spent some time between his leaving Strasbourg and his arriving in Paris in running about the Continent, engaged upon what we must assume to be Masonic business. He had been to Basle, Geneva, Naples and Lyons, in which last city he had achieved a reputation not inferior to that that he had earned in Strasbourg. But the Cardinal was insistent that Cagliostro come to Paris, and thither Alessandro went. Mr. Trowbridge, giving his reasons for Cagliostro's going to the French capital, states that Mesmer—upon whose theories Cagliostro undoubtedly raised his own edifice of charlatanry—had left Paris with 340,000 livres, but I think that Mr. Trowbridge is mistaken in putting the date of Mesmer's leaving France so early. According to my own information, I would assert that Mesmer was still in Paris when Cagliostro arrived there with the Cardinal de Rohan, who had gone some way out of the capital to meet him.

Cagliostro, by this time, was a trained man. Although it was but two years since—if we are to believe the anonymous author of the Warsaw pamphlet—Alessandro had been exposed as a fraud, he had, in the intervening two years, mastered the whole technique of his chosen art. He had passed through the tests imposed upon him in nearly a dozen European cities, and had successfully revealed himself as a master of occult practice. At Bordeaux, he had exposed himself to comparison with the famed practitioner in animal magnetism, Père Hervier, but

there seems no reason to think that his reputation suffered by comparison with that of this well-known and popular mystic. Cagliostro, according to his own statement, came to Paris on the recommendation of the Count de Vergennes, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to which gentleman Alessandro had been given an introduction. Again according to Cagliostro, Alessandro had abandoned medical practice owing to the enmity of the doctors, a statement which would seem not unworthy of our attention.

Whatever the truth of this last statement, certain it is that Cagliostro arrived in Paris, greeted by the Cardinal Prince, who had been awaiting, with a considerable expectancy, his guest's coming.

### §

With the arrival of Cagliostro in Paris, we are once again face to face with the difficulty which confronts every biographer of the famous. There comes a time in the life of every famous man when his fame seems to take on something the nature of a boulder rolling down a mountainside: under its own impetus it must travel ever onwards, nor may its bulk avoid the least augmentation as it passes over the surface of that ground that fate has ordained that it must cover. Thus when a certain point in a man's notoriety has been reached, his notoriety will increase even though he removes himself from human society, and spends his day in an attic of whose existence no one knows. People will talk about him; be there no stories to pass in the course of an evening's gossip, believe me, those stories the gossipers will invent sooner than go without. Thus

with Cagliostro. The Count de St. Germain was now writing his Memoirs at the Court of Hesse-Cassel, but there were many alive in the Paris of that day who had known him: Madame du Hausset, Baron von Gleichen, Madame d'Oberkirch and the rest; and since the Count de St. Germain was gone, it seemed natural that all those astonishing stories that had been told about him should be told now with the Count di Cagliostro as their subject.

I have said before how the Count de St. Germain affected to have lived on this earth many times the span of normal human existence, and it will suffice that I say that Alessandro di Cagliostro soon became the subject of such tales as were told concerning the Count de St. Germain. In the rue Claude, Alessandro and Seraphina set up an establishment not inferior to that conducted by Mesmer, nor was the fame of these two people in any way to be regarded as subordinate to that of the magnetiser. It became the fashion to attend Alessandro's séances, just as it was the fashion, in the Paris of that time, to seek out all that was wayward and bizarre.

When I say that the Count was a success, and when I call the reader's attention to the identity and nature of all those people who have been successes in the same way, it will not be necessary for me more specifically to indicate the course of the Count's career.

From the moment of his arrival in Paris, he was what is known as a social lion, and a social lion he remained until the incidence of the disastrous affair of the Queen's Necklace.

## XXI

CERTAIN people with whom I have discussed the reputation of Count di Cagliostro in the year 1785 have compared his reputation with that enjoyed by Oscar Wilde exactly a century later, and the comparison is a happy one. The older of my readers will agree that between the *réclame* enjoyed by these two notable people is a marked similarity; both enjoyed a fame out of all proportion to their respective intrinsic merits, and both suffered the mortification of seeing that bubble reputation pricked in a second by the publicity attendant upon the revelations of a court-case. Indeed, in order properly to appreciate the standing enjoyed by the Count di Cagliostro in the Paris of 1785 it is necessary to remember the prestige enjoyed by Wilde in 1895. The older of my readers will remember the tremendous reputation of Wilde fifty years ago, and they may rest assured that Alessandro was no less renowned—possibly more so—in the Paris of 1785.

Friend of one of the most distinguished figures of the French Court; himself as glamorous almost as the man whom he had made his protégé; Cagliostro dwelt in the radiance shed upon all who share the friendship of the great. When, in addition to this, we remember that Cagliostro himself was a man known throughout the length and breadth of Europe for the marvels that he might command, we may begin to appreciate why the Italian enjoyed his great

fame. Yet, in a moment, that reputation was destroyed, and the man whose portraits adorned more walls than ever did the smiling features of the most popular Royalty of our time, suddenly found himself the object of the most vulgar innuendos and the subject of the most scurrilous lampoons. History has few cases to show of a reversal of fortune so sudden and complete.

And how was this reversal of fortune brought about? It would seem obvious that it was brought about by the man himself, for it is usually attributable to the follies of the charlatan that his follies be ultimately exposed. Alas! this was not the case, and, against all rules of improving literature, this history has to record that the Count met his doom through the agency of a woman of whom he had doubtless not heard, and with whom certainly he had never had the least important dealings. Nor is it to be argued that the train of events on which this woman embarked, and into which the Count was to be drawn, started without the Count's in any way being marked as an actor in the drama to be played. The sad thing is that the Count, after having enjoyed a spell of extraordinary good fortune, encountered a piece of bad luck, such as have encountered many men better than he and worse. Let us see how the final tragedy of Cagliostro's life came about.

## §

One day the Marquise de Boulainvilliers, passing along the road in her coach, was stopped by a child whose appearance amply confirmed the fact of the child's poverty. It was a young girl who asked the



Marquise to give her some little gift, adding that the money given would be well spent on an orphan sprung from the loins of the Valois. Madame la Marquise, interested in the story that the girl had to tell, enquired of her debtor the details of the child's pedigree. The noblewoman discovered that the girl was the daughter of a certain Jacques-Remy, a poacher, and in other respects a man of dubious reputation, but who was most certainly a son of the House of Valois. That occasion marked Jeanne de Valois's first contact with that nobility that afterwards she was to know so well. The child who had begged a sou of Madame de Boulainvilliers, got herself married to a young officer of the gendarmerie, Nicolas de Lamotte, and as his wife, Jeanne de Lamotte-Valois pursued her ambitions with the same strength of mind as that that she had displayed in demanding help from the Marquise. Through the Marquise de Boulainvilliers, little Jeanne secured an introduction to the Cardinal de Rohan, with which nobleman the heiress of the Valois seems to have created a pleasant impression. Certainly, it was through the influence of the Cardinal that Jeanne's husband was appointed to a company in a dragoon regiment, and the career of Madame de Lamotte-Valois was marked by as undeniable a success as that evinced in the procuring the husband his appointment to the regiment of dragoons. Madame de Lamotte-Valois knew—as all the Paris of her day knew—the Count di Cagliostro, although it is probable that the Count never met socially the woman who was to have so great and so disastrous an influence on his own life.

The Countess de Lamotte-Valois was hard up. She was in that condition in which the immediate



*[Rischgill Studios]*

COUNTESS DE LAMOTTE



acquisition of some money is a necessity of prime importance, and that necessity had impelled her to acquire money by means not the most honest. A member of Court society, she knew that the Cardinal de Rohan had long entertained a passion for the Queen of France, and she knew that the Queen had by no means reciprocated this passion. Such knowledge was the basis of the Countess's plan to extract money from the Cardinal, and, unfortunately for Alessandro, the Count di Cagliostro was fated to be an actor in the comedy which was about to be played.

Already Madame de Lamotte-Valois had shown her mettle as a swindler. Already she had, by the simple trick of fainting in the waiting-room of Madame Elizabeth, earned herself a pension from that royal lady, and the rooking of the Cardinal seemed, therefore, no very difficult task to one who had already plundered the sister of the king.

The swindle was not difficult. Jeanne de Lamotte knew that the Cardinal, despite his undeniable intelligence, was a fool. She knew that he was possessed of a vanity so great that it would be necessary only to tell him that the Queen loved him, and His Eminence would believe it. It mattered nothing that the Cardinal had been treated with considerable disdain by the Queen on those occasions when De Rohan as Grand Almoner of France, had attended certain functions of the Court. It would seem, from historical evidence, that Marie Antoinette did not like the man concerning whom her mother had made such bad reports from Vienna, but it would seem also that the Cardinal either did not know that the Queen disliked him or, knowing that, hoped that his charm might overcome Her Majesty's distaste. Whatever be the truth of

these assumptions, there can be no doubt that the Cardinal entertained as a dear wish the hope that he might overcome the Queen's reluctance to accept him as a friend; more, entertained the hope that the Queen should so far conquer her dislike as to welcome the Cardinal as her lover.

Jeanne knew this, and depended upon the fact of the Cardinal's infatuation in order to carry through a scheme by which she and her husband would establish themselves socially and financially as leading members of the Court circle.

The swindle upon which the Countess now embarked was a scheme, simple enough, but demanding an extraordinary amount of planning. This planning the Countess was able to do, and did. Nicolas, her husband, was apparently a ready tool, and those other actors in the comedy whom Madame de Lamotte saw fit to employ, proved themselves willing assistants.

The leading jewellers in the Paris of that day were Messrs. Boehmer and Bassenge, who had received a royal appointment. Times were not too good. France, quite apart from the unsatisfactory condition of its own economic structure, had been impoverished by a series of wars, the cost of which had materially contributed towards the lowering of the nation's standard of living. Thus Messrs. Boehmer and Bassenge were only too eager to welcome a customer calling at their shop with the promise of some money. We do not know how the two jewellers welcomed Jeanne when she entered their shop; not moving in Court circles themselves, it is not improbable that they had missed seeing the letters that Jeanne de Lamotte had got her friend Rétaux to forge for her;

letters ostensibly signed by Marie Antoinette, and addressed to her dear friend Jeanne de Lamotte. But even if the two jewellers knew nothing of these letters, it is likely that they knew of the heiress of the Valois, and it is certain that the story that the Countess had to tell was told to men not unduly suspicious.

M. Boehmer was anxious to dispose of a necklace that he was offering for sale at the bargain price of sixty-four thousand pounds. In his capacity of Court jeweller, he had taken it to Queen Marie Antoinette, who had admired it immoderately, but who had declined to pay one million six hundred thousand livres for a few pieces of crystallised carbon. Regretfully M. Boehmer took the necklace back to his shop, where it remained without even a prospective buyer, until the Countess de Lamotte called on the jeweller. Madame de Lamotte, having enquired the price of the gewgaw, went straightway to the Cardinal de Rohan, informing His Eminence that the Queen, although not friendly with him, was disposed to change her mind, and the Countess suggested that one way in which the Cardinal might regain the affection of Her Majesty was his buying the necklace that the Queen wanted and could not afford. The Cardinal welcomed the suggestion; he proposed there and then to buy the necklace and take it to the Queen. The Countess de Lamotte dissuaded him from doing this. Marie Antoinette, she said, would be offended were the gift to be made in too obvious a way. The Countess took it upon herself to advise the Cardinal concerning the proper manner in which the gift was to be proffered and accepted. Following the advice of the Countess, the Cardinal called at M. Boehmer's

shop and—still on the Countess's advice—asked the jeweller if he would accept the Queen's promissory note for the amount. The Cardinal naturally made himself surety for the sum involved, and the reputation enjoyed by His Eminence induced the jeweller to accept De Rohan's security for the payment of his bill. M. Boehmer, accepting the Cardinal's guarantee that the purchase would be completed, drew up a contract, which instrument the Cardinal passed on to Madame de Lamotte, for the purpose of obtaining the Queen's signature. The contract was, some days later, returned to the jewellers, with the words "*Bon, bon—approuvé—Marie Antoinette*" scrawled at its bottom. It will hardly be necessary to point out to the reader that Marie Antoinette had never seen this agreement, and that the endorsement had been written by the forger friend of Countess de Lamotte and her husband: M. Rétaux. For a Court jeweller M. Boehmer would seem to have been singularly unacquainted with the signature of his royal patroness, or else M. Rétaux would seem to have executed his forgery with the maximum amount of skill. Whatever the truth of this, the fact is that M. Boehmer accepted the Queen's endorsement—as he thought—and handed over a million and a half's worth of diamonds to the Countess de Lamotte.

It will not offend the susceptibilities of even the least cynical reader when I assure him or her that the Countess, in accepting the necklace from M. Boehmer, had no intention of passing it on to the Queen. As it happened, the necklace was taken to London by the Count de Lamotte, and there disposed of. In the meanwhile, the Countess and her husband lived in the extravagant manner to which swindling had

taught them to become accustomed; M. Boehmer thought no more about the necklace that he had sold to the Queen, and the Cardinal de Rohan thought greatly about an affair in which he had been lucky enough to be of service to his Royal Mistress.

And after the lapse of a small period, the Cardinal began to ask the Countess de Lamotte what mark of favour he might expect from the Queen as recompense for his having gone surety for the necklace. His Eminence, despite his fifty-thousand-a-year income, was in debt, and to undertake the guarantee of a bill of sixty-four thousand pounds was an act calling for a generosity or a resourcefulness out of the usual. Accordingly, the Cardinal approached Madame de Lamotte, asking the Countess why, after having obliged the Queen in so splendid a fashion, he had not received any marks of Marie Antoinette's favour. All that the Cardinal had received was a letter from Marie Antoinette saying: "I am delighted that I need regard you no longer as culpable. It is not possible at this moment to grant you the audience that you crave. I shall let you know as soon as this will be possible. In the meanwhile be discreet." It was not for the Cardinal to know that this letter had been written by Rétaux.

Naturally, the Cardinal was astonished that, after having written him this charming if brief note, Marie Antoinette had not followed it up by some more open mark of her favour. De Rohan might believe that the Queen's discretion could impel her to ignore him at Court functions, but why, asked the unhappy Cardinal of himself, were no secret marks of favour shown him? Why no letters delivered privily by some trusted servant? Putting his case to



the Countess de Lamotte, the Cardinal expressed himself as hurt by the neglect; nay, more, the ingratitude; of Her Majesty, and since the Countess was a friend of Marie Antoinette's, he looked to Jeanne for an explanation.

The Countess de Lamotte, with a million and a half livres' worth of diamonds in her husband's pocket, had an interest in obliging the Cardinal. She explained to His Infatuated Eminence that the Queen was forced to move with perfect discretion, but that Her Majesty was as sensible as was the Cardinal of the need of making a proper acknowledgment of De Rohan's kindness. Provided, said Jeanne, that Her Majesty might rely on the Cardinal's own discretion, a meeting could be arranged between Queen and Prelate. The Cardinal willingly gave his undertaking to say nothing of such a meeting, could the Countess arrange it, and subsequently, in the darkness of the gardens at Versailles, the Cardinal knew the inexpressible pleasure of receiving a flower from the hands of the Queen.

Of course, it was not the Queen who handed the lovesick man his flower; it was a little street-walker named Mademoiselle D'Oliva, who had been bribed to play her part. All that she had to do was to accept the Cardinal's extravagant obeisances, to hand him the flower, and to murmur: "You may hope that the past shall be forgotten." This brief utterance filled the Cardinal's heart with joy, and what answer he would have given to the pseudo-Queen's remark we shall never know, for Rétaux, dressed in the livery of a palace servant, came up to the couple with a warning that Madame and the Countess of Artois were approaching. Hurriedly, Mademoiselle D'Oliva

extended her hand for the Cardinal to kiss, and the ninny made his way quickly out of the gardens.

That little comedy settled for a moment the agitation of Cardinal de Rohan, but the Countess de Lamotte had overlooked the natural business-man's caution of M. Boehmer. Months passed, and M. Boehmer wrote to remind the Cardinal that he had undertaken, should the Queen not see fit to settle her account, to discharge his own indebtedness (assumed by guarantee) by payments extended over an agreed period. This letter appears never to have reached the Cardinal, and failing an answer, M. Boehmer wrote to the Queen. We do not know whether the letter from M. Boehmer was opened by the Queen or by a secretary; all that we do know is that again M. Boehmer's answer was not forthcoming. Eventually, failing a response to his demands for payment, the jeweller found it necessary to seek a personal audience of the Queen. Marie Antoinette professed herself completely ignorant of the matter raised by Boehmer. She denied, not only having purchased the necklace, but also having instructed the Cardinal de Rohan to act as her intermediary. M. Boehmer, horrified by the fact that he had allowed more than sixteen hundred thousand livres' worth of jewellery to leave his hands, lost his head. Instead of approaching the Cardinal with a request for an explanation of the difficulty, he denounced the Cardinal as a swindler; and the Grand Almoner of France, to the astonishment of the whole world, was put under arrest, charged with the commission of a common theft.

Since having acquired the necklace, the Count and Countess de Lamotte had lived in astonishing

splendour, and now the Countess endeavoured to escape the consequences of her fraudulent dealings, by impudently asserting that she had, in stealing the necklace, done no more than act as the Cardinal's agent. Thus she implicated the Cardinal as a principal rather than as a dupe, and the Queen, who had never borne His Eminence any great love, was delighted to see the man exposed to so great a humiliation. The Countess de Lamotte also stated that the idea of effecting the swindle had come in the first place from Alessandro di Cagliostro; and thus the four people, Cardinal de Rohan, Countess de Lamotte and the two Cagliostros, were lodged in prison to await their trial, which came before the Courts nine months after the arrests of the persons charged.

The English legal concept of Contempt of Court is one peculiar to this land. In no other country is the principle applied in quite the same way, and abroad it is the custom to discuss matters which are *sub judice* with a degree of licence unthinkable here. It was the custom in the Paris of 1785 for the accused persons to publish manifestos, in which they stated their case, without regard for the reputation of hostile witnesses. Thus the Countess de Lamotte from her cell in the prison of Sainte-Pélagie, issued a printed statement whose one purpose was to blacken the character of those persons whom she had accused. The Count also published his own statement, which first of all denied his complicity in the matter of the necklace, and, with a vanity typical of its author, went on to give Cagliostro's own version of the childhood and career, since then, of this extraordinary man. For the first time, the story of his own life, as given by himself, was recorded in full; a story

that he was to tell on oath at the subsequent trial; and this story forms the basis of the account of Cagliostro's life as given by the Inquisition-Biographer.

Admitting the propriety of attempting, by the issue of these manifestos, to sway the jury to a favourable opinion of the accused, one cannot deny that Cagliostro was singularly ill-advised in having elected to tell his own version of his life at such a time. This was one of those occasions calling for the exercise of common sense, and it was not an action dictated by common sense to tell the story of Althotas and his lessons in alchemy at a time when Cagliostro was accused of an impudent fraud. When, during his trial, Cagliostro confirmed the statements made in his manifesto, the Court was impelled to contemptuous laughter by the extravagance of the tale that the mountebank had to tell.

"What are your plans?" Althotas asked Cagliostro at the time of their first meeting.

"I intend to seek riches."

"That is, you would rise superior to the common herd, the imbecile mob? A laudable project, my son!"

The imbecile mob, listening to this tissue of many lies and a little truth, revelled to see the climber in a condition considerably below that of the common herd, and signified its pleasure at the sight in roars of unkind laughter. It did not help the Count that he was discharged from the Court freed from all suspicion of complicity in the theft. The Countess de Lamotte's denunciations in open Court had created an air of suspicion that the Count's equally fervent denunciation of her could not entirely dissipate. But the most harm was done to the Count's reputation by the Count himself: by his ridiculous

posturing; made still more ridiculous by the extravagance of his costume; and by the absurdity of the story that he had to tell.

Palermo was forgotten in Cagliostro's carefully edited version of his career. He could not, he told the Court, say with certainty where he had been born, but his youth had been spent in the city of Medina, where he had lived in the Palace of the Mufti Salahaym; it being hardly necessary, Cagliostro blandly assured his audience, to point out that the Mufti was the chief person of the Mohammedan religion, and that Medina was the city in which he constantly resided.

Cagliostro told the Court that he perfectly well recollected having had four persons attached to his service: a governor, whose name was Althotas, and three servants; a white one who discharged the duties of *valet-de-chambre*, and two black ones, one of whom never left Cagliostro's presence.

It is now considered likely that this man, Althotas, enjoyed an actual existence, but although he is thought to have visited Malta in the time of the Grand Master Pinto, with whom Cagliostro himself claimed acquaintance, we can feel ourselves disposed as little to accept Cagliostro's full version of his own life, as were the Parisians of 1785. But the obvious disbelief of the Court—surely it must have been obvious even to so great an egotist as Alessandro?—did not deter him from telling the whole fantastic sequence that twenty years of imagination had enabled him to invent. Undeterred by smiles or open laughter, the Count went on to tell how he had been left an orphan when only three months old; that Althotas had told him that his parents were nobly born and Christians,

(although it would seem probable that Pietro Balsamo was of Jewish extraction). He continued the preposterous narrative, assuring his listeners that Althotas had treated him like a father, and had done his utmost to develop the talent that the orphan had early displayed for scientific research, particularly in the subjects of botany and chemistry. He added that it was Althotas who had taught him to worship God, to love and assist his neighbours, and everywhere to respect religion and the laws. At any other time and in any other place this self-advertisement might have done Cagliostro the benefit that he evidently looked to it to give, but he had mistaken the temper of the crowd that he was addressing. What he did not realise, but which Napoleon's clear-mindedness permitted him to see, was that it was not Cardinal de Rohan, Count and Countess di Cagliostro, or even the two De Lamottes, who were on trial, but the unpopular Queen Marie Antoinette, concerning whom the people had already made up their minds to believe the worst. A woman who is hissed by her people when she walks abroad, and concerning whom the filthiest libels were permitted by public opinion to be printed and sold openly, without their author's earning the least punishment: a woman so unpopular may not look for unbiased judgment when she is accused. For no one believed that the Queen was not implicated in some degree in this sordid affair. Herr Stefan Zweig, in his admirably objective study of this unfortunate woman, says that "nothing but deliberate malice, nothing but intentional calumny, can involve Marie Antoinette in any way with the doings of this prize adventuress and feeble-minded Cardinal. It cannot be too often reiterated that the

Queen was unwittingly and innocently entangled in the dishonourable affair by a gang of swindlers, forgers, thieves, and fools."

Nevertheless, this most fair of historians is careful to point out that—"all the same, Marie Antoinette cannot be 'discharged from Court without a stain upon her character'. The fraud was so successfully staged because the tarnish upon her reputation gave courage to the cheats, and because those that were gulled were predisposed towards unhesitating belief in any act of heedlessness upon the Queen's part. Had it not been for the levities and follies of Trianon, continued year after year, this comedy of lies would have been inconceivable. No one in his senses would ever have ventured to suspect Marie Thérèse, for instance, of carrying on such a clandestine correspondence as that relating to the diamond necklace, or that she would have given such a man as the Cardinal an assignation after nightfall in Versailles park. Rohan and the jewellers would never have swallowed the tale that the Queen was short of money and wanted, on the quiet, through a go-between, to buy an expensive diamond necklace and pay for it by instalments—unless Versailles had for years been buzzing with evil tongued whispers about nocturnal adventures in the park, about jiggery-pokery with the royal jewels, and about unpaid debts. . . . Though, in all the preposterous intricacies of the necklace affair, Marie Antoinette was, in a sense, blameless, she remains blameworthy that so gross a swindle could have been attempted and victoriously achieved under cover of her name."

Curiously enough, no one seems to have believed over much in the Cardinal's own guilt, but the trial

was forced by the vindictive desire of Marie Antoinette to get even with a man whom she believed to be guilty of an impudent abuse of her own good name. Herr Zweig, in speaking of Marie Antoinette's insistence that this matter be tried in full, quotes Napoleon as saying, "The Queen was innocent, and, to make sure that her innocence should be publicly recognised, she chose the Parliament of Paris for her judge. The upshot was that she was universally regarded as guilty."

With her genius for making enemies, she now contrived to alienate even those who had formerly, for the sake of their own pleasures, supported the Queen. The people's affection she had lost, if indeed she had ever enjoyed it; which seems unlikely; for, from the beginning, she had been 'that Austrian woman'; but Court circles had supported her, understandably enough, nor were the purveyors to the royal household unmindful of the fact that her extravagant tastes had not been without a markedly beneficial effect on art and trade. But now she had offended two more powerful classes of French society. She had offended the nobility and the Church, both represented in the person of the Cardinal Prince Louis de Rohan. The nobles were outraged that one of their number, concerning whose innocence of conscious fraud they do not seem to have entertained the least doubt, should be sacrificed to the fury of a vindictive woman; nor was the Church better pleased that the Cardinal had been carted off to jail by the tipstiffs just as he was on the point of celebrating Holy Mass. Thus, as the trial drew near, a great public had been secured, by the folly of this woman, for those speeches of defending counsel which were coming off the presses in



their tens of thousands for the titillation of a Continent's inquisitiveness, and the final undoing of the Crown of France.

"What a magnificent, what a fortunate affair! A Cardinal disclosed as a thief, and the Queen implicated in a most unsavoury scandal. . . . The crozier and the sceptre are being bespattered with mire! What a triumph for the ideas of Liberty!"

Did Cagliostro's prescience come to his aid now, and warn him that he was acting a principal part in the advent of that Revolution for which many have accused him of working? It will not be difficult to understand his emotions as he realised that he was arrested through the action of the Queen and remembered the personal felicitations of the King and herself sent by her to the man who had effected the miraculous recovery of the Prince de Soubise. It is not difficult to appreciate that Cagliostro must have been torn between a desire to revenge himself on the woman whose vindictiveness had placed him in so equivocal a position (I talk now of the Queen) and a desire to commit himself to no act which should hereafter redound to his discredit. We see how he chose the latter course, and thus we find him, who could have told the Court about those mysteries of the Egyptian Rite which used to take place in the house in the rue Claude, contenting himself with telling his audience how the Mufti would converse with him on the pyramids of Egypt, and on those vast subterranean caves excavated by the ancient Egyptians to be the repository of human knowledge and a shelter for the precious trust from the injuries of time.

He told them how, not daring to question Althotas concerning his own origin, seeing that curiosity

concerning his birth always earned Cagliostro a rebuke from his tutor, he attempted to learn from his negro attendants the secret of his birth. He told them how, after a while, Althotas relented sufficiently to warn Cagliostro that were he to leave Medina he would be threatened with the direst misfortunes. In particular he warned Cagliostro to beware of the city of Trebizond.

"My inclination, however, got the better of his forebodings. I was tired of the sameness of the life that I led at the Sherif's Court. One day, when I was alone, the Prince entered my apartment; he strained me to his bosom with more than usual tenderness; bade me never cease to adore the Almighty, and added, bedewing my cheeks with his tears: 'Nature's unfortunate child, adieu!'

"This was our last interview. The caravan waited only for me, and I set off, leaving Medina, never to re-enter it more."

Then followed a story which, if details were a sign of truth, ought to be regarded as the most veracious of narratives. He told his audience how he had gone from Medina to Malta, where he had been received by the Grand Master, Pinto, who had assigned to the Chevalier d'Aquino, of the princely house of Caramania, the duty of attending upon Cagliostro. It was in this island, according to Cagliostro, that he first adopted the title and name which he now bore. From Malta, according to the Count's statement, he had made his way to Rome by a somewhat circuitous route, bearing a letter of credit on the Italian banking house of Belloni. In Rome, too, he made the acquaintance of Cardinals Orsini, York and Ganganelli, who was afterwards Pope Clement

XIV. According to Cagliostro, the Pope of that day expressed a great desire to see him, and Cagliostro affirmed that he had many audiences of His Holiness, a friendship that the Count might have done worse than to improve. He told how he had met Seraphina in Rome, taking care to point out that she was a young lady of noble birth; but after having stated that he married her in Rome in 1770, the Count had nothing more of importance to say; and concerning the fifteen years that had elapsed since his marriage with the young Roman noblewoman, he was singularly reticent. Unfortunately, none of all this was believed. There was no atmosphere of the miraculous to mesmerise his audience into crediting him with supernatural powers, and the only miraculous aspect of the affair was provided by the credulity of the jewellers and the Cardinal, and the folly of a Queen who could wash such very dirty linen in public.

But if those people who listened to Cagliostro's own account of his wonderful career were disinclined to give it any tributes more valuable or flattering than a guffaw, they did not forget that he was a victim of the Queen's folly, and whatever sort of charlatan the average Parisian saw in the Count, they also saw in him one who had suffered at the hands of their enemy; so that when, on May 31st, 1786, the Parliament of Paris pronounced the unanimous verdict of the judges, which verdict resulted in the immediate release of Cardinal de Rohan and the two Cagliostros from custody, the public expressed its hatred of the Queen—as an insult to whom the verdict was rightly interpreted—by according to the liberated prisoners the ovation usually reserved for the most popular

of the nation's heroes. Cheering crowds followed the Cardinal and the Count back to their respective residences, and the Count might have been forgiven for thinking that the affair had passed off without having done more than to give him some valuable publicity in return for the nine months of imprisonment that he had been forced to endure.

For it had been made immediately obvious to the judges that the Count could in no way have been guilty of complicity with the two De Lamottes. During the whole period when Jeanne de Lamotte was visiting the jewellers, and Rétaux was forging his letters, Cagliostro was in Bordeaux and Lyons, nor did he arrive in Paris until the January of 1785, and thus one day only before the Cardinal handed over the necklace to Madame de Lamotte for delivery to the Queen. On February 1st, the jeweller received, in return for the necklace that he gave to the Cardinal, his Eminence's own guarantee, so that had Cagliostro really taken some part in the fraud, as Madame de Lamotte claimed, he left himself a very short time in which to do it. The Bench soon perceived the falsity of these allegations of Madame de Lamotte, and when the Count left the Court, it was as a man freed from all suspicions of complicity in the affair.

"I quitted the Bastille," says Cagliostro, "about half past eleven in the evening. The night was dark, the quarter in which I resided but little frequented. What was my surprise, then, to hear myself acclaimed by eight or ten thousand persons! My door was forced open; the courtyard, the staircase, the rooms were crowded with people. I was carried straight to the arms of my wife. At such a moment my heart could not contain all the feelings which strove for

mastery in it. My knees gave way beneath me. I fell on the floor unconscious. With a shriek, my wife sank into a swoon. Our friends pressed around us, uncertain whether the most beautiful moment of our life would not be the last. The anxiety spread from one to the other, the noise of the drums was no longer heard. A sad silence followed the delirious joy. I recovered. A torrent of tears streamed from my eyes and I was able at last, without dying, to press to my heart . . . I will say no more. Oh, you privileged beings to whom heaven has made the rare and fatal gift of an ardent soul and a sensitive heart; you who have experienced the delights of a first love; you alone will understand me, will appreciate what, after ten months of torture, the first moment of bliss is like! ”

Allowing for the rhetorical extravagance of this passage, it is probable that no more sincere words were ever penned by man.

## XXII

**B**UT if the sight of that courtyard, packed with those who had turned out to give the Count a welcome back to his house, had assured him that his old ascendancy might soon be regained, the events immediately following his release were to persuade him that the venom with which the Countess de Lamotte had attacked him in open court had served its evil purpose only too effectively. The Parisians might have cheered the Cardinal and the Count, and demanded that they appear on the balconies of their respective houses, so that they could cheer them, and hiss at the name of the Queen; but the Parisians were not deceived into thinking the Cardinal any other than a libidinous, gullible fool, nor the Count other than a mountebank. They had seen him appear in Court in his coat of green silk, embroidered with gold; with diamonds on his fingers, in his stockings, hanging from his fob-chain; his hair gathered up in its golden net, with the ribboned tails of it sticking through the meshes of that net; and the whole fantastic costume topped by an enormous musketeer's hat decorated with long white ostrich plumes. Nor were his replies to the President of the Court calculated to destroy the impression of buffoonery that the costume had created. When the President put the formal question to him: Who are you? the reply was calculated to disturb the gravity of the listeners. "An illustrious traveller," the Count began,

and proceeded to tell the story of his life, until the gypsy's warning concerning Trebizond impelled the Court to burst into uncontrollable laughter. Even the Count's brazen assurance was not proof against so unequivocal an expression of contempt, and in the nervousness induced by the laughter of the crowd, the Count relapsed into a jargon composed, says Beugnot, of all known languages, as well as those which never existed. Desperately endeavouring to make himself understood, the Count's barbarous hotch-potch of tongues succeeded only in rendering him not even heard. The laughter in the Court was so loud and prolonged, that the judges, laughing themselves, could not ask their questions. But it was evident that the sympathy of the Court lay, despite the laughter, with the Count, and when Cagliostro drove away from the Court, it was through a cheering mob.

Yet that mob, full of sympathy as it might be, had seen the mysterious wonderworker subjected to a cross-examination like any other accused person, and the ridicule which had been heaped upon his story by the statements of Jeanne de Lamotte, and the laughter of those who listened to the Count's replies, had effectually prevented the Count's regaining that position that he had once enjoyed. When Madame de Lamotte had described him as an archempiric, a mean alchemist, a dreamer on the philosopher's stone, a false prophet, and a profaner of the true religion, he had given answers which in other circumstances might have been regarded as satisfactory. He had replied that he had often heard the word 'empiric' without knowing exactly what it meant, but that if it meant one who, without being a doctor, had some

knowledge of medicine and took no fee; who attended to rich and poor alike, and received no money from either; then he confessed that he was an empiric. While, he continued, without going into the question of whether or not he was an alchemist, the epithet 'mean' was applicable only to those who begged or cringed, and it was well known that the Count di Cagliostro had never asked a favour of anyone. And as for his dreams, on the Philosopher's Stone or on any other subject, he had kept his opinion to himself, and never troubled the public with his dreams; and with regard to the accusation that he was a false prophet, he had not always prophesied falsely, for had the Cardinal taken his advice, he would not now be in the position in which he found himself. Cagliostro had more than once warned him that the Countess de Lamotte was a deceitful, intriguing woman.

Nor was it true, Cagliostro said, to call him a profaner of the true religion, a more serious accusation than the others. He had respected religion at all times. His life and his outward conduct he freely submitted to the enquiries of the law. As to what passed inwardly, God alone had a right to call him to account.

Had the matter rested there, it is possible that the Count's reputation had not suffered serious damage; but the Countess de Lamotte, full of malice, was not going to let the Count escape her venom. Her wit was of that kind which finds its happiest expression in pouring ridicule on others, and she gave a lively description of a fraudulent séance which had been conducted by Cagliostro, whom she accused of having preyed on the credulity of the foolish Cardinal. Yet even after this, Cagliostro's *savoir*



*faire* showed in the remark that he made concerning Madame de Lamotte, who had just expressed her regret that she did not live in those blessed times when a charge of sorcery would have led him to the stake. Raising those slightly prominent eyes of his to heaven, in the look seen in mediaeval pictures of Christian martyrs suffering for their faith, the Count announced that he forgave Madame de Lamotte the tears of bitterness that she had caused him to shed, since he realised that her calumnies were inspired, less by hatred of the man who had never wronged her, than by the desperation induced by her present equivocal position. From the bottom of the abyss into which she had plunged him (he told her) he would raise his voice to implore on her behalf the clemency of the laws; and if, after his innocence and that of his wife should be acknowledged, the best of kings should think an unfortunate stranger who had settled in France, on the faith of the King's royal word, of the laws of hospitality and of the common rights of nations, were entitled to some indemnity, the only satisfaction he should require would be that His Majesty might be pleased, at his request, to pardon and set at liberty the unfortunate Countess de Lamotte. However guilty she might be supposed, she had been already sufficiently punished. Alas! he had been taught by sad experience that there was no crime ever so great but it might be atoned for by six months in the Bastille.

Sincere? Who can say? Let us not forget that the Count had already spent more than six in that prison. But Madame de Lamotte was not softened by this charitable statement. Picking up a candlestick, she aimed it at the Count's head; but her aim being no

better than that of most women, it landed instead on the Count's stomach, to the open joy of the spectators, who must have prayed that the Countess would be granted the wish, expressed to her counsel, that in order to render the scene still more amusing they had only to give her a broom-stick.

Yes, the rites of Egyptian Masonry were never conceived to be discussed in open Court. The magic of its ritual was not proof against the vulgarising influences of a court of law, and although the Count may not have realised it, the cheers of the crowd were valedictory, not only for the man himself, but for that reputation that he had once enjoyed.

Nor had the author of all his troubles yet finished with him; if the people cheered the Count because by cheering him they could insult the Queen, and if Marie Antoinette might see in Parliament's verdict a calculated insult to herself, she on her part could apply some balm to her own wounded feelings by hurting those whom Parliament had declined to convict. Parliament had condemned Jeanne de Lamotte to be taken to a public place, there stripped to the waist, flogged and branded with the V of *Volense*. But the Queen, however much this savage sentence might please her, found it intolerable that the Cardinal and the Count should go scot-free. Having made the mistake of arresting the Cardinal and having him tried, the Queen now passed on to the greater folly of asking the King to show his dissatisfaction with Parliament's verdict. Unable to refuse this mad woman the least favour, the King consented to alienate what small body of the Parliamentarians still bore him respect, by stripping the Cardinal of all his honours and sending him into

exile. While the Cardinal was exiled to one of his abbeys, Cagliostro was ordered to leave the country. The police arrived at the house in the rue Claude with the news that the government wished him to take himself out of Paris within one week, and out of the country within three. When the news of this expulsion got abroad, a greater crowd than ever gathered around the gloomy old mansion, cheering Cagliostro and screaming the most opprobrious epithets against the Queen. But Cagliostro was in no mood now to enjoy a popularity which would mark him out as the enemy of the Throne. He was fearful that the government would consider such popularity a proof of his treasonable designs, and when, in response to the mob's calls, he came out on to his balcony, it was to ask the people to move quietly away. From Paris he went first to Passy, and then to Boulogne, from which port, seen off by a crowd of more than five thousand people, he embarked with his wife in a ship bound for England. Never again was he to set foot on the soil of that France in whose history he had played so important a part.

## §

When the historian considers the case of Alessandro di Cagliostro he finds himself constantly marvelling at the extraordinary mixture of good sense and folly that the character of the man exhibits; the mixture of *savoir faire* with an almost childish capacity for being duped. Well, Cagliostro had not only been duped (by Jeanne de Lamotte) but had been made the victim of an unscrupulous Minister's vindictiveness. No one but the Baron de Breteuil could have had the effrontery to administer to Cagliostro the

penalty reserved for criminal dealings, when it had been demonstrated beyond question that the man was guiltless of any part, even an unwitting one, in the affair of the necklace. It is not unknown for juries to acquit the criminals where they have more sympathy with the criminal than with his accusers, but in the case of the acquittals, both of the Cardinal and of the Count, this was not the case. Both men were so clearly innocent of the charges brought against them—brought against them, be it remembered, on the denunciation of the Countess de Lamotte—that even the Parliament of Paris, eager though it was to administer a slap in the face to the Queen, can hardly be accused of perverting evidence for the benefit of prejudice in dismissing the charges brought against the two men.

We may imagine, therefore, that it was with an understandable resentment that the Count submitted to lock up his house in the rue Claude, and leave the country in which he had found much good fortune. It is impossible to know how much truth there is in the story that Seraphina, whose fidelity to her husband had been, in the twenty years of her marriage, one of her most noticeable, indeed remarkable, characteristics, should have, at the age of thirty-two, abandoned that fidelity in favour of a certain Chevalier d'Oisement, with whom Madame was reported to have had several assignations, and on whose account Cagliostro was said to have experienced, for the first time, the pangs of jealousy.<sup>1</sup> If the story be true, Cagliostro may have felt that his forcibly leaving France may have been a not unmixed misfortune, but the authority that we have for this story is dubious.

<sup>1</sup> Seraphina's earlier escapade (with M. de la Radotte) Cagliostro is said to have regarded with irritation rather than jealousy.

So that we may conclude that Cagliostro judged himself to be a man bitterly wronged, and thus the letter that he wrote from London, which is dated 26 June, 1786, and addressed '*To the French People*' may be taken as the sincere expression of what Cagliostro really felt.

This letter is one of the greatest mysteries that Cagliostro's life can show us. Does it represent the prediction of a declared occultist? Or was it, as many must feel, the prediction of a man who had enough 'inside information' to enable him to make a statement of fact which should sound to those not in the know like the expression of a supernatural prescience?

Some people think that in this letter, addressed, as I say, '*To the French People*', and sent by Cagliostro to a friend in Paris but little more than three weeks after the close of the trial, Cagliostro threw off the mask, and that in this letter, although couched in the rhapsodical phrases which had become his natural speech, Cagliostro published the first manifesto of the Revolution.

Years later, those ringing phrases were to take the soldiers of the revolutionary army searching through the Papal dungeons, in order to find the man who had sounded one of the first tocsins to clang the doom of the Monarchy.

But in 1786 the Monarchy was yet in possession of at least the outward forms of power. The Baron de Breteuil, conducting his fight against the *Rohanistes*, under which general term were included all enemies of the government, had not discriminated in favour of the man to whom King Louis and Queen Marie Antoinette had once sent their personal congratulations on his curing the Prince de Soubise; the man of

whom King Louis had always spoken in the most flattering terms; the man whose bust had been sculptured by the great Houdon; whose face decorated walls and snuff boxes and brooches; and of whom the following quatrain had been composed:

*De l'ami des Humains reconnaissez les Traits,  
Tous ses jours sont marqués par de nouveaux bienfaits.  
Il prolonge la vie, il secourt l'indigence ;  
Le plaisir d'être utile est seul sa récompense.*

No, the Baron de Breteuil, head of the government, was as wholesale in his repression of the enemies of the Monarchy as is Hitler in his destruction of the enemies of his own power. Unfortunately for De Breteuil, the greatest enemy of the Monarchy it was beyond his power to suppress: Queen Marie Antoinette. The perverse folly of this woman may never properly be understood save by those doctors whose work is the examination of mental disease.

For who but a maniac obsessed with the satisfying her inordinate desire to have her own way in the face of opposition, however reasonable, could have insisted on the production of the *Marriage of Figaro*, even though its author was a man of infamous reputation, and that the play itself, when finally produced, with the Queen and her ladies acting in it, should have been stopped by Louis's own orders? Desirous, as I say, of getting her own way even at the expense of all that life had to offer her in such extravagance, Marie Antoinette demanded of the King that the production of this play—itsself a hardly veiled sneer at the Monarchy—go on. No matter that Baron de Breteuil fought his *Rohanistes*; no matter that Calonne, Madame de Lamotte and others of the anti-monarchist

party could be punished. No matter that Madame de Lamotte, screaming her curses and denunciations, had been branded as a felon before a large crowd. What could the Baron de Breteuil do to Beaumarchais, the literary blackmailer, who, in his *Avis important à la branche espagnole sur les droits de la couronne de France*, had recorded, for the edification of the world, the facts of Louis XVI's impotence, and in the same pamphlet had called the mother of the Queen, the Empress of Austria, a rogue, and the King himself a bad subject? The Baron de Breteuil must have writhed with the sense of frustration that the sight of Beaumarchais's impudent acceptance of his new immunity surely inspired in the Minister, who knew well in what terms the playwright had referred to the Queen's mother; who knew that Beaumarchais had libelled the King himself; and who was not ignorant of the fact that, on the orders of the Empress-Mother, to whom he had had the insolence to send a copy of his filthy pamphlet, Beaumarchais had been arrested in Vienna as a blackmailer, and on being received into prison, had suffered the customary punishment administered on admission: a caning in those circumstances which are proper to the correction of juvenile delinquents, but which degrade a man beyond belief. This was the man for whose play Marie Antoinette had worked so hard; the play in which she was to play Rosine, and the Count of Artois to play Figaro himself; the play for whose production Louis had had to suffer the humiliation of withdrawing his own personal ban upon it.

No wonder that from Vienna her brother wrote to Marie Antoinette, urging her to exercise at least a primitive discretion, and to conceal what she might

not resist. He reproved her for the greediness with which, despite the country's continued deficiency in income, she bought all the jewels and trinkets that the two German Jews, Boehmer and Bassenge, brought for her inspection.

"I have news from Paris to the effect that you have been buying bracelets at a cost of two hundred and fifty thousand livres, with the result that you have thrown your finances into disorder and have heaped up a burden of debt. . . . These reports wring my heart, especially when I think of the future. . . . A queen only degrades herself by decking herself out in this preposterous way; and she degrades herself still more by unthrifty expenditure, especially in such difficult times . . . I hope I shall not live to see the disaster which is likely to ensue."

Marie Antoinette's mother, too, wrote in a similar strain, alarmed to hear the reports coming from the French Court: of how the King was mocked by the Queen, for the sniggering entertainment of the sycophant hangers-on. She urged her daughter to consider that the King's lack of graces; his heaviness of body and clumsiness of gait; were not deficiencies to which the Court be invited to laugh; that the Queen's own prestige depended upon her supporting the prestige of her husband.

But all these warnings, all this advice, all these admonitions, fell upon the deaf ears of an empty-headed woman, and there were many in the France of that day, pretending to no occult power, who might have prophesied the end, if not of the Monarchy, then of absolutism, in terms as definite as those employed by Count di Cagliostro in his *Letter to the French People*.



A biographer has pointed out that while other *Rohanistes* published the vilest libels against the Queen, Cagliostro imputed his misfortunes solely to the activities of the Baron de Breteuil, and apportioned the blame accordingly; so that in the famous *Letter*, Cagliostro attacked rather the Government and the principles of monarchy than the persons of the Monarchy themselves. He goes on to say "This letter, written the day after his arrival in England, was immediately published in pamphlet form, and even translated into several languages. Scattered broadcast over Paris and all France, it created an immense sensation. . . . Of all the pamphlets which, from the Necklace Affair to the fall of the Bastille, attacked the royal authority, none is so dignified or so eloquent. The longing for freedom, which was latent in the bosom of every man, and which the philosophers and the secret societies were doing their best to fan into a flame, was revealed in every line. It was not unreasonably regarded as the confession of faith of an Illuminist."

It is the opinion of the present writer that it may not properly be regarded as anything else. Consider the title alone: who were 'the people' of France at that time, that Cagliostro should have apostrophised them; unless the term 'the people' possessed for him an esoteric significance? Why, the States General were not to be convoked for another three years, and the only privilege enjoyed by the people of France was the privilege of working and paying for an idle, parasitic nobility. And yet, the friend of kings, suffering from a just resentment, addresses his letter, not to the King whose servants had wronged him, but to the peasant working in his fields under the

shadow of the great château; to the peasant working in the *corvées*; giving of his time in forced labour, so that the rogues of France should be maintained free of all cost to Government; to the slums of Paris, and all the degraded sons of Eve who dwelt therein; to the wretches shivering in the darkness of the State prisons, condemned without trial and filled with no hope. To these he addressed his *Letter*, and I will not believe that this compliment was a meaningless gesture on the part of one in whom unhappiness had quickened the sensibility. No, Cagliostro, addressing a social class which at that time had no real existence, knew well what he was doing: he was announcing the Revolution.

"Are all State prisons like the Bastille? . . . A barbarous silence is the least of the crimes there committed. For six months I was within fifteen feet of my wife without knowing it. Others have been buried there for thirty years; are reputed dead; are unhappy in not being dead; having, like Milton's damned souls, only so much light in their abyss as to perceive the impenetrable darkness which enwraps them. I said it in captivity, and I repeat it a free man: there is no crime but is amply expiated by six months in the Bastille.

"You have all that is needed for happiness, Frenchmen! All you want, my good friends, is one little thing: to be sure of lying in your own beds when you are irreproachable. To labour for this happy revolution is a task worthy of your Parliaments. It is only difficult to feeble souls. . . ."

And then follows the curious statement that Cagliostro would return to France, provided that the Bastille be destroyed, and its site turned into a public

promenade. Mr. Trowbridge is careful to point out that Cagliostro did not, as so many other biographers have asserted, make the statement that "the Bastille would be destroyed, its site become a public promenade, and that a King would reign in France who would abolish *Lettres de Cachet* and convoke the States General.' This should be pointed out, for it is possible that Cagliostro's remark, that he would return to France provided that the Bastille were destroyed, may be merely an expression of his own dissatisfaction with the conditions obtaining in that notorious prison. My accepting of Cagliostro's *Letter* as the manifesto of a revolutionary is based, firstly, on the style of its dedication and, secondly, on the revolutionary sentiments with which it is informed. But, when the Revolution finally came about, the revolutionaries discerned in that reference of Cagliostro's to the Bastille an encouragement to the people to effect what, in truth, they did effect, and thus Cagliostro—charlatan and friend of kings as he might have been—became in the eyes of the revolutionaries a man of a position somewhat analogous to that enjoyed by the Prophets in the estimation of the Christian Church.

### §

Yet, with that open revelation of his intentions; with that emerging from the darkness of the mystery into which he had retired; Cagliostro, revealing himself more ordinary than he would have permitted people in the past to think him, exposed himself to the troubles which must overtake ordinary men. The paradoxical element of that declaration of revolutionary sentiment enshrined in the famous *Letter* is

apparent when we consider the fact that the *Letter* owed its importance to the reputation that Cagliostro had enjoyed as a mystic, and that because of the importance of that *Letter* that same reputation of mystic was instantly destroyed.

And now we see the Count, not so young as he was, and shaken sadly by the sad events of the past nine months, endeavouring to pursue the same profitable courses that he had followed in Courland, in Germany, and France. But it is a singular fact that, as appetite grows with eating, so does imposture thrive on old impositions. And it is true that as your glutton may not survive a period of abstinence which would hardly be noticed of a temperate man, so one small rebuff will serve to destroy the self-confidence of the over presumptuous. History affords us too many proofs of the truth of these statements that I should need to defend them by adducing examples. Suffice it to say that the Count would seem to have lost that boldness of plan and manœuvre which characterised his Parisian adventures. Instead of his descending naked on a golden sphere, to be received by the neophytes of Isis in their diaphanous chiffon draperies, so that he might initiate them into the Egyptian mysteries as a preliminary to the banquet which was to follow, we find him hanging around a dreary pub in Great Queen Street; although a less dreary pub than that which now occupies its site, for the Great Queen Street of those days still possessed the Inigo Jones houses which remained until the coming of this more civilized age. The author remembers to have heard an impecunious journalist, in the Rainbow Tavern in Fleet Street, boasting that he himself, out of his

meagre resources, had subscribed five guineas towards the building of that vast edifice called Freemasons' Hall, and which stands opposite to the pub that O'Reilly took when he moved from the King's Head, in Gerrard Street. The journalist told the writer that this gross edifice had cost a million pounds, a statement that the writer sees no reason to dispute, since the price of buildings nowadays is reckoned solely on the cost of steel joists and bricks and facings of mock stone, and the architect is under no obligation to provide a thing of beauty, seeing that those who commission his work would be in no way to appreciate beauty, even were he, by chance, to give it to them.

But in 1786, Great Queen Street was a delightful little thoroughfare. A bit dirty, perhaps, to our way of thinking, for the Commissioners who look after the sanitary arrangements of the metropolis had not yet been given the unlimited power that public apathy, derived from ignorance and a lack of pride, has now given them, and a century was to elapse before, with the establishment of the London County Council, municipal government was elevated into a racket.

At the top of Great Queen Street (opposite Endell Street) stood the Hercules Pillars, of which the landlord was Mr. O'Reilly, possibly the best friend that Cagliostro ever had. Arrived in London, to Mr. O'Reilly repairs the Count, and we may imagine the meticulous description of tragedy on one side, and the extravagant sympathising on the other, which must have taken place in the snugger of the Hercules Pillars when these two old friends met. For, consider, the Count was now a character of international fame, while O'Reilly was, for all that he may have been

the English representative of the Order of Strict Observance, not advanced much beyond the position that he enjoyed when he received the Count into the brotherhood that Alessandro was to make so popular and so potent.

We may imagine that the Count went to O'Reilly with the tale of his troubles, and there is no reason to suppose that O'Reilly considered himself less bound now by the rules of the Brotherhood than he had been when he gave Cagliostro fifty guineas in order to take himself out of England, and out of the power of such harpies as Miss Fry.

But, alas, what a change had come upon the Count! No longer may he take his town mansions, and thereto invite the flower of nobility. Instead, sitting in the bar-parlour, he and O'Reilly, necessarily interrupted by the frequent calls upon the publican's attention, work out an advertisement to be inserted in the *Morning Herald* :

#### TO ALL TRUE MASONS

In the Name of 9, 5, 8, 14, 20, 1, 8;—9, 5, 18, 20, 18.

The time is at hand when the Building of the New Temple, or New Jerusalem 3, 8, 20, 17, 8, must begin; this is to invite all True Masons in London to join in the Name of 9, 5, 18, 20, 18 (the only one in whom is a Divine 19, 17, 9, 13, 9, 19, 23) to meet to-morrow Evening, the 3d. instant, 1786 (or 5790) at Nine o'clock at Riley's, Great Queen Street; to lay a plan for the laying the first stone of the foundation of the True 3, 8, 20, 17, 8; in this visible world, being the material representative Temple of the Spiritual 9, 5, 17, 20, 18, 11, 5, 12.

A Mason, and Member of the new 3, 8, 20, 17, 8.

One can imagine O'Reilly, the humble branch-manager, and the Count, still the nominal head, surveying the completed draft over their glasses.

"Do you think that will do?" the Count asks hopefully.

"I should think so," O'Reilly replies. "It certainly should fetch them in. I don't see how people could avoid responding to it."

It is more than likely that O'Reilly then found the money to take round to the *Herald's* Advertisement Office, leaving the Count to persuade himself that things had not changed; that better times were coming; and that there was life in the old dog yet.

*Quantum mutatus ab illo . . . !*

## XXIII

COMPARED with his loss of self-confidence, mortal enemies seemed relatively unimportant, but, nevertheless, there was an enemy, whose industriousness in the cause of Cagliostro's ruining matched in energy the malice which prompted the industriousness. That man was Theveneau de Morande, who was, all his life, an ardent supporter of the Monarchy, and whom many have suspected—with every reason—to have been in the closest contact with the French Government of that time.

Already the Baron de Breteuil had shown his anger with Cagliostro, following the publication of the *Letter to the French People* by making an attempt to kidnap the author. Extradition treaties were unknown in those days, but any government, needing the repatriation of a wanted subject from another country, could usually arrange with the government of that country, provided it were friendly, to trick the subject into coming to his country's Embassy or Legation, when arrangements could be made to bring the wanted man home. Accordingly, De Breteuil ordered the French Ambassador in London to convey to the Count permission to enter France—a rescinding of the order of expulsion delivered to Alessandro after his acquittal from complicity in the matter of the necklace. This permission to re-enter was conveyed to Alessandro at his lodgings, with a request that the Count should present himself



the following day at the Embassy, in order to receive further particulars of King Louis's clemency. Unfortunately for De Breteuil's designs, the Count took the precaution of inviting Lord George Gordon and a French friend, named Beigeret de Frouville, to accompany him to the Embassy, and to be present during the interview. This invitation was accepted by the two gentlemen, and M. Barthélmy, the Ambassador, failed to entice Cagliostro back to France, a lucky escape for the Count, for like certain Agents of today, the French Police did not consider their jurisdiction limited by the boundaries of their own country, and pursued their victims even into the remotest of other lands. It was in order to evade capture by the agents of the French Government, that Jeanne de Lamotte preferred to fling herself out of a London window.

We do not know how greatly the Count valued his escape, but he was soon to be made aware of the unrelenting enmity of the French Government. Having eluded the bloodhounds of the French police force, Cagliostro was immediately exposed to the venomous attacks of Theveneau de Morande. Had De Morande lived in these days, his filthy rag would have been taken over by a group of financiers, and floated as a public company, and those wishing to calumniate a neighbour would have been invited, by means of posters on the sides of buses and in the tunnels of the underground railway, to 'advise the *Courrier de l'Europe* about it'. De Morande knew all the tricks. Long having realised that truth, though stranger than fiction, is the enemy of journalistic success, he never had troubled to put his hand even an inch below the surface of that well in which truth

lies hidden. What facts Theveneau de Morande needed, he could supply out of his own vicious imagination; and when the upholders of the corrupt monarchical system of France called on this *commis-voyageur* of royalty to suppress a rival concern, Theveneau de Morande obeyed the summons with an alacrity not altogether referable to impersonal considerations.

The first article attacking the Count appeared in the *Courrier* on September 1st, 1786, and the series continued over a period of two months. Cagliostro, in order to reply to the accusations of De Morande, utilised the columns of the *Public Advertiser* for this purpose. De Morande had told, in brief, and with far less adherence to the truth, the story that the reader has seen in the preceding pages of this book; stressing what was bad and touching but lightly on what redounded to the Count's credit. The Count's statements in his own defence were conducted with more restraint and dignity, and it is probable that the argument had been decided by popular opinion in favour of the Count, had not a most unfortunate thing happened.

It will be remembered that Cagliostro had asked M. de Frouville and Lord George Gordon to accompany him to the French Embassy. Arrived there, the Count had asked how it was possible that a simple letter of M. de Breteuil had been able to revoke the *lettre de cachet*, by which Cagliostro had been exiled, and which *lettre de cachet* had been signed by the King himself? Alessandro told the Ambassador that he recognised neither M. de Breteuil nor his orders. He then asked the Ambassador to show him the Minister's letter or a copy of it, and, on this request

being refused, Cagliostro's suspicions—and, which was more important, those of Cagliostro's friends—were confirmed.

In a letter written afterwards to the *Public Advertiser*, Cagliostro pointed out that had he been asked by the Governor of Boulogne or of Calais by whose authority he had sought to return to France, he would have been unable to give a reasonable answer, and would immediately have been imprisoned.

Which, of course, was what De Breteuil intended.

But, alas! this interview with the Ambassador had taken place with Lord George as a witness, and that inflammable person instantly constituted himself the defender of Cagliostro. He, too, wrote to the *Public Advertiser*, but his letter, instead of confining itself to an examination of the Count di Cagliostro's wrongs, included also an examination of the character and wrongdoings of Queen Marie Antoinette, which woman Lord George, in his undisciplined way, libelled monstrously. Lord George was not the first of those to cast aspersions on the character of the Queen, but his attack on Marie Antoinette was of the nature of that straw which breaks the camel's back, and with the appearance of this latest libel King Louis's patience was exhausted. Determining to put a stop to this flood of irresponsible abuse, the King instructed his Ambassador at the Court of St. James to bring an action for libel against Lord George, for whom the British Government itself had no great affection. As a biographer rightly points out, in the ordinary way an enemy of France would have had nothing but sympathy from an English court of law; but Lord George had declared himself an enemy of the British Government as well, and now that

Government was only too happy to use the excuse of his libel in order to revenge itself upon him. Accordingly he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, and mulcted in a heavy fine.

But it is with Cagliostro that we are concerned here, and the championship of such disreputable friends was not calculated to advance Cagliostro's cause. Let us not forget that the Count had already known the experience of dismissal from a foreign country, and even without assuming that he had lost his nerve altogether, it will be easy to understand that he was conscious how needful it was to avoid drawing the authorities' too close attention to himself.

One may sympathise then with the Count's action in writing to the *Public Advertiser*, disclaiming all connection with Lord George, save in the way of friendship, and asserting his own deep respect for the King of France and his servants.

It would seem that the servants of the King of France were deceived by this *amende* into believing that they might yet lure the Count back to France, for, a month after the publication of this letter, the Ambassador himself called upon the Count with an order, signed by the King's own hand, revoking the *lettre de cachet*.

But Cagliostro was not so easily to be snared. He did not know, he says, whom to trust, but it is sad to reflect that his fate in France would probably have been less tragic than that which awaited him in Rome.

Convinced now that Cagliostro intended to resist the blandishments of their Ambassador, the French Government ordered Theveneau de Morande to

redouble his efforts to blacken the character of the Count, doubtless in the belief that the British Government, reading De Morande's statements, would see fit to deport Cagliostro as an undesirable alien. This De Morande had started his journalistic career by blackmailing Louis XV, in regard to a pamphlet that the man had printed, abusing Madame Dubarry. His first work had been *Scandalous Anecdotes of the Court of France*, and this delicate production was followed by the *Memoirs of a Street-Walker*, the subject of which was Madame Dubarry. King Louis XV endeavoured to secure the extradition of De Morande, but was informed by the British Government that that extradition was only possible should De Morande be convicted of libel. Failing this, the British Government pointed out, the only way to get Morande into France was by kidnapping him, a proceeding that the British Government would view with sympathy, provided that it were done with the greatest secrecy, and in such a manner as not to wound the national susceptibilities.

Encouraged by this friendly advice, the French Government sent a number of agents to this country in order to cart De Morande off to France; but the blackguard, having been apprised of the agents' coming, published the news of the projected kidnapping in the press, and the Frenchmen barely escaped being thrown into the Thames by an English crowd exercising its ancient privilege of defending the victims of tyranny.

After this rebuff, it remained to the French Government only to *purchase* De Morande's silence; and Beaumarchais, having, in view of his own spectacular career as blackmailer, been entrusted with the task

of negotiating with De Morande, succeeded in settling the matter for the sum of thirty-two thousand livres in cash and a pension of four thousand livres a year for life.

After his fashion De Morande was a genius. Even the British Government, when the time came for it to regard the editor of the *Courrier* with disapproval, was forced, in the words of Brissot, the Girondin who had once worked on the journal, "to resign itself to the inevitable, and to suffer the *Courrier de l'Europe* to continue to injure England under the English law".

The journal was owned by a Scotsman named Swinton, a rogue not inferior to the man whom he employed to edit his property. The first editor had been a Frenchman named Serrès de Latour, and the enterprise of conducting a French journal in London had received the blessings of the French Foreign Secretary of the time, the Count de Vergennes, who saw in the journal a means of learning much of English policy. "Latour's gazette," said the Minister, "is worth an hundred spies!"

When Theveneau de Morande took over the editorship of the *Courrier*, he had already enjoyed a successful career as a spy; finding, in the activities of the French colony in London, much that might with profit (and no little exaggeration) be reported to interested parties in the home-country. Swinton was well known to the French colony for another reason: he conducted a disorderly-house for the benefit of those French visitors to England who had not yet learnt to understand our coinage and standards of values.

In partnership, Swinton and Theveneau de Morande

were invincible. Undeterred by any sense of consistency, De Morande lied as the lies came into his head, and it did not worry him in the least that the libel that he published one week concerning his victim should be contradicted by himself the week after. He was the prototype of the modern journalist: give 'em sensation, and to hell with the truth! Heavens, De Morande would have been a peer had he lived to-day!

This was the man who, acting under the orders of Versailles, set out to ruin the Count. For two months, as I said, he attacked Cagliostro with every weapon in his grubby armoury: ridicule, denunciation and downright lying. On one occasion he said that the Count was the son of a Neapolitan coachman; on another he affirmed Alessandro to have been the valet to the alchemist Gracchi, from whom the valet had stolen the secrets. Again De Morande contradicted himself by affirming that the Count's secrets did not exist (although he had stolen them from Gracchi) and that Alessandro's wonder-working was fraudulent from start to finish.

Towards the end of the series of articles, the identity of Balsamo with Cagliostro was claimed, and the history of Balsamo and his wife, as embroidered upon by De Morande's airy fancy, was given in full. It is said that a halt in the attacks marked the time when De Morande approached Cagliostro with the cool suggestion that the Count buy immunity from further persecution.

It is never a pleasant thing to submit to blackmail, but it had been a wiser thing to agree to De Morande's proposition than to do what Cagliostro is said to have done: indignantly reject it.

There had arrived in England the advocate who had defended Cagliostro in the Diamond Necklace trial, and to this man Alessandro now went, with the request that the lawyer draw up an answer to De Morande's charges. This Thilorier did, and the answer was published under the title of *A Letter to the English People*, in which, among other of De Morande's claims, that Cagliostro was one with Giuseppe Balsamo was denied. (But why not, seeing that a warrant was out for Balsamo's arrest, and, further, that the whole reason for Cagliostro's adoption of a new name was the desire to adopt a new identity?)

Unfortunately, neither Alessandro nor his counsel were fitted, by nature or by training, to fight so deadly an enemy as the editor of the *Courrier de l'Europe*. Apprised of Thilorier's arrival, and of the advocate's work on his client's behalf, De Morande anticipated Cagliostro's answer to the several charges which had appeared in the columns of the *Courrier*, and the careful tabulation of De Morande's own villainies that Thilorier and Cagliostro had compiled, by challenging the Count to disprove the charges made against him. Thus De Morande sought to draw the public attention away from the very great obligation on himself to disprove the grave charges made against *him*. Among those things with which De Morande had charged Cagliostro was the making a statement that the lions of the Arabian forests were killed by the Arabians' setting as snares the poisoned carcasses of hogs fattened on arsenic.

Anyone who has been at an English music-hall will understand that English humour derives from the sense of *strangeness* experienced by the audience in the contemplation of an idea. As most of the



people of England lack that lively curiosity in the world around them which makes for a widening of knowledge, most things outside the immediate circumstances of their constricted lives appear strange, and thus, exceedingly humorous. Comedians who have played to foreign audiences have assured me that the Englishman's lack of interest in the world beyond his own home-circle make him the most easily pleased listener in the world; the most ready to laugh; the most disposed to forgive the absence of wit, provided a suitable eccentricity mark the dress of the 'comedian'.

Theveneau de Morande knew this; knew that any reference, however valid, to the manners and customs of a foreign people will be sure of raising a laugh in England. He got his laugh; and the Count, stung to indiscretion by the guffaw that De Morande's sneer aroused, wrote a letter to the *Public Advertiser*, denying that such a story as that of the arsenicated pigs had ever emanated from him, but challenging De Morande, all the same, to a duel to be fought with the toxic porkers.

"I am now going, Sir Jester, to have a joke at your expense. In physics and chemistry, arguments avail little, persiflage nothing; it is experiment alone that counts. Permit me, then, to propose to you a little experiment which will divert the public either at your expense or at mine . . ."

The experiment proposed was this; that, on Lord Mayor's Day, 1786, the two men should meet for lunch; Theveneau de Morande to provide the drinks and Cagliostro to supply the food—a sucking-pig. Two hours before the meal was to commence De Morande should see the piglet alive and healthy, and



[Reprints Studios]

### CAGLIOSTRO AND BROTHER MASH

RARE CARICATURE CONCERNING THE VISIT OF COUNT CAGLIOSTRO TO THE LODGE OF ANTIQUITY, NOV 1ST, 1786, AND THE REBUFF HE RECEIVED THERE CAGLIOSTRO IS THE FIRST PERSON SEATED ALONGSIDE THE TABLE



Cagliostro offered not to come near it until its roasted carcase should be lying in its dish.

"You shall cut it into four parts, and, having chosen the portion that you prefer, you shall give me what you think proper. The next day, one of four things will occur: either we shall both be dead, or we shall neither of us be dead; or I shall be dead and you will not; or you will be dead and I shall not. Of these four chances I give you three, and I will bet you five thousand guineas that the day after the lunch you are dead and that I am alive and well."

A sporting offer, and a great pity it is that De Morande was too great a coward to call Cagliostro's bluff. Instead, the Editor hedged, demanding that the test take place in public, and suggesting that, as a subject for the experiment, some other animal than a pig be employed, a suggestion of which Cagliostro (or Thilorier) was quick to take advantage. Cagliostro instantly wrote a letter to the *Public Advertiser* commenting on the proposed change.

"You refuse to come to the lunch to which I invite you, and suggest as a substitute some other carnivorous animal? But that was not my proposition. Such a guest would only very imperfectly represent you. Where would you find a carnivorous animal which, amongst its own species, is what you are amongst men? It is not your representative, but yourself, with whom I wish to treat . . ."

There was; there could have been; no answer to this. The Count was winning the combat, and that the unscrupulous journalist had no intention of permitting. And had he allowed the battle of words to continue, there is every reason to suppose that the

Count might have come off best. Instead, De Morande hypocritically apologised to his readers for having written excessively on so futile a subject, and left the Count to lick a wound which was to prove fatal. By denying the Count the chance of refuting the charges that De Morande had made against him—ridiculous and contradictory though were many of them—the cunning Frenchman made certain that his calumnies would achieve their object; for among our English proverbs we have preserved the high-minded sentiment enshrined in the remark that ‘where there’s smoke there’s fire’; a proverb which has been the justification of every slander since Britain first, at Heaven’s command, arose from out the azure main. De Morande must have been well acquainted with the traditional English licence to vilify when he so deliberately set out to ruin the Count. And of course he remembered that other English apophthegm about some of the mud always sticking. . . .

## §

Certainly the mud stuck to the once splendid figure of the Count; dimming the glories of his blood and state. And although the printed attacks had now ceased, the agent of Versailles continued as industriously as ever to plan the Count’s total overthrow. Why Marie Antoinette should thus have sought the ruin of the Count, when all that he had done was to deserve acquittal by a Court which had expressed its contempt for her, must remain one of history’s unanswered questions. It is understandable that she might have associated him with the impudent pretensions of Jeanne de Lamotte; it is even possible that

she believed him guilty; but neither of these things may explain the ferocity with which she ordered her agent to hunt the man down; giving him no peace until the grave should extend him a last refuge. When one considers how she forgave Beaumarchais; Beaumarchais, the blackmailer; the man who had insulted her mother and mocked at her husband . . . !

But hunt Cagliostro she did. De Morande had received his instructions, and the one loyalty that the man knew was to the Crown of France. Not necessarily to the persons of the King and Queen, but most certainly to the institution of Kingship itself.

And it must explain the conscientiousness with which De Morande obeyed his orders, that he was aware of the revolutionary nature of Cagliostro's Illuminism. De Morande was a member himself of a masonic lodge, but we know that he was never a revolutionary, though he may well, in his chosen profession of spy, have belonged to a revolutionary lodge. It surely needed no great urging on De Breteuil's part to inspire De Morande to ruin the author of the *Letter to the French People*. It must have been, for De Morande, a labour of love. . . .

## §

England has been kind to many refugees from less happier lands; we have given sanctuary to a notable company, among which the names of Voltaire, Napoleon III and Lenin spring first to mind. But there have been many others, and most of them have found a welcome here out of all proportion to their deserts. But one who can have left these shores only with bitterness in his heart, and a deep wonder that

Almighty God could have so far forgotten Himself as to create such a race of wolves as the English; one who never, in any of his three visits to this country, received one kindness for which he did not pay; and who was marked down, from the first moment of his first stay in England, as one to be plundered; that one was Alessandro di Cagliostro. Though he said that any crime might be expiated by six months in the Bastille, he had not yet experienced the full horror of all that England could do to him. When, after his expulsion from France, Cagliostro arrived in this country, he carried with him a letter of introduction to Swinton, who let him a house in Sloane Street, at an excessive rental, and supplied Cagliostro with the furniture necessary to equip it, at a cost far above the price that such goods would have commanded in the open market. Swinton lived in the house next door, and when he had settled the business of letting Cagliostro the adjacent property, Swinton, who had been an apothecary and still ran a chemist's shop, suggested to Cagliostro that this shop should be the medium by which the Count's several nostrums might be offered to the public. This suggestion Cagliostro would not consider, any more than he would consider Swinton's other suggestion: that he should give a public exhibition of his skill in the healing art. The Count, with commendable prudence, declined to call the attention of the authorities to himself or his activities. It is said that Swinton offered to advance the sales of Cagliostro's elixirs by means of puffs in the *Courrier de l'Europe*.

Now, after De Morande's disgraceful attacks on Cagliostro had ceased to appear in the *Courrier*, and it was no longer possible for Swinton to proffer his

false friendship, the two men, proprietor and editor; united in their aim to ruin the Count; utilised Swinton's own house as headquarters of the campaign for Cagliostro's downfall. Inside the front door of Swinton's house now lurked the bailiffs hired by the unscrupulous Scotsman; bailiffs waiting to pounce on Cagliostro the moment he showed his nose in Sloane Street. De Morande looked up the acquaintances of Cagliostro's earlier visit, and Cagliostro himself stated that O'Reilly had been offered a hundred pounds to make an affidavit to the effect that the Count, leaving England in 1777, had done so without paying his debts. This O'Reilly declined to do, but De Morande's interference with O'Reilly did at least have the effect of causing the friendship between O'Reilly and the Count to vanish, why we do not know.

This was a sad blow to the Count, for he could ill afford to lose at this time any friend; the more so, one who had proved himself loyal and true. I have mentioned that, from the address of O'Reilly's tavern, the Count had issued an advertisement, calling upon all true Masons to meet 'at nine o'clock at Riley's, to lay a plan for the laying the first stone of the foundation of the true Jerusalem'; an advertisement whose wording, as Mr. Sax Rohmer shrewdly points out, suggests that Cagliostro had at this time the intention of forming a Lodge to be conducted on Swedenborgian principles. This advertisement appeared in the *Morning Herald* in the November of 1786, while the Count's stinging reply to De Morande's suggestion concerning the substitution of the pig, appeared in the *Public Advertiser* under date of September 3rd of the same year. In the two months intervening, we may imagine that spiteful Frenchman plotting how



he might use Cagliostro's enemies to ruin the Count, and turn into enemies those who were still his friends. Alas! with O'Reilly, De Morande's vicious schemes succeeded perfectly; nor did the Frenchman, as industrious as he was malicious, fail to make a good use of Cagliostro's declared enemies. By methods that he understood only too well, De Morande made contact with Aylett and Pergolezzi,<sup>1</sup> and the perjured lawyer, according to De Morande, was prepared to swear that Giuseppe Balsamo and the Count di Cagliostro were one and the same, and this statement, the Editor added, Pergolezzi was prepared to endorse. De Morande, seeking persons to assist him in his foul campaign, came upon Priddle also, whom the reader will remember to have met in the business of Miss Fry's arbitration. Priddle was easily persuaded to take out a writ against the Count for a debt of sixty pounds, due to him, so he said, as legal costs incurred at the time of the Count's previous visit. The bailiffs who were to serve this writ were naturally hidden in Swinton's house, but being privily advised of Priddle's action, the Count anticipated service of the writ by procuring bail before it could be served, and the affair ended happily enough by Priddle's going to prison instead of the Count. All the same, the Count was obliged to pay nearly two hundred pounds in costs, in order to retain his freedom.

So the campaign to ruin the Count was pursued with every dirty art of which De Morande was the acknowledged master. There is no need to give in detail the story of persecution, in which one perjured statement is followed by another so rapidly that it is surprising that the Count could have borne the

<sup>1</sup> Or *Pergolari*

undeserved baiting as long as he did. He remained in London until the May of the following year, but it was not a court-case which finally resolved him to go.

De Morande, as I have said, was a Mason, and it was doubtless due to this fact that he learnt of Cagliostro's having founded an Egyptian Lodge in this country, its members being principally those who had followed him from the Continent. At first it seemed that Egyptian Masonry would flourish in England, but an unfortunate accident, of which the details are obscure, destroyed the movement's hope of succeeding. So far as we may gather, Cagliostro offered to transmit his occult powers to a favoured few of his Brotherhood, but being unversed in the proper handling of such powers, the amateur occultists blundered badly, and it is said that instead of evoking angels they succeeded in raising only devils; an alarming experience enough in all conscience, but one which, at this time, was fatal to the Count's reputation. De Morande must have got to know about this; but it was left to one, Brother Mash, to deliver the decisive blow to the Count's fortunes. Brother Mash was a member of the Lodge of Antiquity, that Cagliostro himself had joined. The Count had already seen, in the changed attitude of his brother Masons, the terrible effects of De Morande's attacks, and when one night the Count turned up at a Lodge meeting, it was to find Brother Mash playing the buffoon, tricked out in a ridiculous garb intended to represent the ritual vestments of the Grand Cophta himself. One may imagine the pain with which the once 'divine' Cagliostro watched the humorist affecting the ridiculous postures and even more ridiculous language of the quack doctor at a country fair, offering

a bottle of coloured water as a panacea for every human ill. The Count left the meeting, knowing that he might never return again; but lest this blow should prove not fatal to Cagliostro's hopes, the savage Gillray applied his venomous wit to a burlesque reproduction of the scene which was supposed to have occurred at the Lodge of Antiquity. With this drawing, Gillray presented the following verses:—

### EXTRACT OF THE ARABIAN COUNT'S MEMOIRS

“ Born, God knows where; supported, God knows how;  
From whom descended—difficult to know;  
Lord Crop adopts him as a bosom friend,  
And madly dares his character defend.  
This self-dubb'd Count some few years since became  
A Brother Mason in a borrow'd name;  
For names, like Semples, numerous he bears;  
And Proteus-like in fifty forms appears.  
' Behold in me (he says) Dame Nature's child;  
Of Soul benevolent and Manners mild.  
In me the guiltless Acharat behold,  
Who knows the mystery of making Gold;  
A feeling heart I boast, a conscience pure,  
I boast a Balsam every ill to cure.  
My Pills and Powders all disease remove,  
Renew your vigour and your health improve.'  
This cunning part the arch-impostor acts,  
And thus the weak and credulous attracts.  
But now his history is render'd clear:  
The arrant hypocrite and knave appear;  
First as Balsamo he to paint essay'd,  
But only daubing, he renounc'd the trade;  
Then as a Mountebank abroad he stroll'd;  
And many a name on Death's black list enroll'd.  
Three times he visited the British shore,  
And ev'ry time a different name he bore;  
The brave Alsatians he with ease cajol'd,  
By boasting of Egyptian forms of old.

The self-same trick he practis'd at Bourdeaux,  
At Strasburg, Lyons and at Paris too.  
But fate for Brother Mash reserv'd the task  
To strip the vile impostor of his mask.  
May all true Masons his plain tale attend!  
And Satire's laugh to fraud shall put an end."

Poor, poor Cagliostro ! What was it that Lenin had, and Orsini, the anarchist, and Finkelstein, who more euphoniously is known to us as M. Maxim Litvinov? and that Cagliostro lacked? Some essential quality that the English demand in those to whom they agree to be nice. All these others had it, and England offered them friendship as well as hospitality. But this quality, whatever it may be, the Count did not possess, nor might acquire. And thus the attitude of the English rendered inevitable what indeed came to pass: the Count left England for ever.

## XXIV

AND now the last sad act was to be played: the 'red coppery splendour'—as Carlyle calls it—to darken more and more into final gloom. Without advertisement; almost, one might say, secretly; the Count left England, this time without even the good wishes and fifty guineas of the kind-hearted O'Reilly. This last visit to England had deprived him of everything, it seemed, that the disastrous happenings of the days in France had left to him: he had lost his money, his friends and his reputation.

The tender-hearted will not want to examine too closely the state of mind of a man in such a position: it is not good to probe too deeply into the suffering heart. Nor may the moralist justly rejoice at the spectacle of a man degraded, who was once unduly elevated. If vengeance be the Lord's, the satisfaction that contemplation of vengeance produces must equally remain the business of the Lord. Let mere humanity have nothing to do either with vengeance or its contemplation, remembering that it is more through lack of courage than through possession of principle that most of us do not attempt an emulation of such men as Alessandro di Cagliostro. And before we rejoice too much in the discomfiture of such, let us ask ourselves if that rejoicing must not imply an equal regret that we ourselves have escaped the just consequences of our own wrongdoings?

Since none of us—saye lunatics—regret that, let none of us regard with too pronounced a satisfaction

the final act of the drama of Cagliostro's life. I am certain that few of my readers will view, except with pity, the ultimate catastrophe: the perfection of the tragedy according to the rules of the Greek dramatists, where the *atè* must always follow on the *hùbris* of over-confident spirits. One may not strive too long to engage the attention of the jealous Gods. . . .

For the first time in his married life, Cagliostro left Seraphina behind him; I do not mean for a few days, but for many weeks. A time had come when he could no longer afford to spend a penny more than was necessary, and it was essential that he repair his shattered fortunes without the expenditure of one unnecessary penny before he might arrange that his wife join him.

Accordingly he left Seraphina in the care of two friends, Mr. and Mrs. Philip de Louthembourg, a pair of 'magnetisers' of the school of Mesmer and his imitators (more particularly, perhaps, of his imitators): the Marquess de Puységur, the Chevalier de Barbarin, Dr. Mainauduc, and Benjamin Perkins. This couple, of which the male partner was a distinguished painter, had fallen under the spell of Mesmer's doctrines, and had effected many 'cures' in a manner reminiscent of seventeenth-century Valentine Greatraks, and—if one may believe contemporary accounts—with no little financial profit to themselves. Mackay tells us how De Louthembourg once gave a demonstration of his skill at his house in Hammersmith; admission by ticket only—one guinea to three guineas; to which three thousand persons were unable to gain admittance. It was with the De Louthembourgs that the Count left his fair

Seraphina, the while he went to pick up the scattered fragments of Egyptian Masonry abroad.

It will be hardly necessary to point out that his going thus secretly was made the occasion of another attack by De Morande. The Frenchman, drawing attention to the Count's departure, claimed that both the departure and the manner of the going were attributable to nothing less than the Count's having decamped with his wife's jewellery, a libel which remained undenied until the Countess, on rejoining her husband at Bienne, issued a statement to the effect that the charge against the Count was untrue, and that her corroboration of the libel (as reported by De Morande) had never been given.

The truth is that there was every reason why Cagliostro could not afford to advertise his leaving England or the route that he proposed to follow. He had already had some taste of the intentions of the French Government, and had been made aware, in only too unmistakable a fashion, of the assiduity with which his enemies were prepared to pursue their aims. It is said that a former friend of the Count's, De Vismes, had been specially brought over from France in order to decoy Alessandro into the clutches of De Breteuil's men. No, the Count would have been an even greater fool than we know him to have been had he left this country except by stealth.

As it was, he escaped the clutches of De Breteuil, and made his way to Basle, in Switzerland, where his reception by those of his disciples who were still loyal to him must have encouraged him to think that the London disaster was more in the nature of a temporary setback than the indication of a definite change in his fortunes. In Basle he found, not only

many who still professed the principles of Egyptian Masonry, but he found, among them, the banker, Sarazin, for whom, by his arts, Cagliostro had procured, some years before, the joy of an autumnal paternity. Less optimistic men than the Count might well be forgiven the grasping at such hope as this friendly reception in Basle offered. When one considers how low in spirits the Count must have been on arriving in Basle, one cannot be surprised that he eagerly accepted the apparent invitation of Fate to reconstruct his success with the least delay. During his cross-examination in Paris, the Count had declared that Sarazin would have given him the whole of his fortune had the Count asked for it, so that now it seemed little enough to ask that Sarazin provide the money for the foundation of a new Lodge, to be called The Mother-Lodge of the Helvetic States. How much money was forthcoming for this venture is not known; not enough, apparently, to provide an establishment of more than modest style; but therein the Count would seem to have conducted his thaumaturgical séances undisturbed by the disgraceful occurrences which marred his contacts with London Masonry. It appears that he lived at this time in Bienne, upon the charity of Sarazin. At Bienne, Seraphina, with Mr. and Mrs. de Loutherbourg, joined him.

It puzzles the biographer to know why, seeing that we have no reason to doubt Cagliostro's success with the adepts of Basle, he should have decided to move on. Perhaps the man's nerves were so frayed with the unremitting persecution of the past two years that he had developed what our modern psychiatrists know as a 'persecution-mania'; that over-



whelming persuasion that we are on the run—which overwhelming persuasion allows us to suspect an enemy lurking behind every corner; to see the designs of our ruiners in the most innocent occurrences of everyday. When the victim of unkindness has reached this state of suspiciousness he may find relief from his unreasonable fears only in flight. Always he must seek fresh scenes; he is happiest to rise before daylight, and to find himself leagues away from the place where he has slept, before the sun has risen over the house-tops. Never may he know the comfort of putting on his slippers before the fire of a dwelling that is known to be his own; always he must live in concealment, hiding his movements, his identity, even his very face. For, to the sufferer from this grievous malady, there can be no respite this side the grave. However fast and far he travel, those who, in his disordered imagination, pursue him, travel faster and farther.

Is this, then, the reason why the Count leaves his friends in Bienne and Basle; moves on to Aix-les-Bains; staying there just long enough for the Countess to take the waters; then pushing on, on. . . , ? To Turin, only to be presented with an order to leave the city. . . . To Vicenza, where the Countess (infected now, surely, with this terrible flight-sickness ?) pawns what few jewels are left to her. . . . To Roveredo, small Tyrolese town, where he makes a few converts to Egyptian Masonry and provides an anonymous writer with the material for a pamphlet of such substance as to lead to the Emperor Joseph's expelling the Count from the town. Then to Trent, seat of a Prince-Bishop not unlike Louis de Rohan in his love of the occult. Was Fate relenting . . . ? The Prince-Bishop invited the Count to stay in his palace; it

would be an unimaginative person who could fail to picture the gratitude with which 'Nature's unfortunate child' accepted the invitation.

But Fate had learnt a lesson from Theveneau de Morande. Let the Prince-Bishop extend his protection as he might; let his Highness announce that the Grand Cophta had forsworn his unorthodox beliefs and had asked to be received back into the bosom of Mother Church. The people of Trent knew well of the Prince-Bishop's interest in the Grand Arcanum, and the interpretation that they put upon his friendship with the Count was one not complimentary to that dignitary's reputation as a Churchman. They complained to the Emperor, and Joseph was once more compelled to issue an order of expulsion against the Count; but this time Cagliostro was expelled, not merely from a town, but from His Imperial Majesty's extensive dominions.

Now the 'Divine Cagliostro' knew the sensations of the cornered fox. Escape southwards was impossible: the Pope was there. Escape northwards was equally unthinkable: had not the order of the Emperor been explicit . . .? Where then . . .?

Where were the Kings and Princes who had once honoured with their friendship the man who knew the secrets of Life and Eternity; who could bend Nature to his will, and who could call spirits from the vasty deep . . .? Alas! neither Kings nor spirits were here now to answer his call. He was alone . . .

"O foulest Circean daught, thou poison of Popular Applause! Madness is in thee, and death; thy end is Bedlam and the Grave."

Alone . . .

## §

The days are vanished—in this country, at least—when it was a public pleasure, as well as a public duty, to watch the death of the condemned criminal. Shall the historian declare himself less affected of the slow processes of civilisation than others, and examine too minutely the end of that we know already to be doomed to finality; to be already, in truth, ended. . . . ? This minute examination may be excused the doctor, with some pathological purpose to explain his careful attention to the progress of decay; the historian has no such excuse. For history was never properly concerned with death, save when that death cheated itself in fertilising a new and greater life. And that thing may not be said of the passing of Alessandro di Cagliostro. . . .

So what should be the purpose in telling in detail the events of those last sad days, when, stripped of everything—even hope—the Count wandered through the smaller towns and villages, hawking his cures like the very country-fair quack that Brother Mash had represented him to be; playing the shabby bagman for his once magnificent Egyptian Rite; begging a few coppers for a proffered imparting to the dull—credulous of the Secret of Life? What purpose, eh?

Trapped between the hostile forces of Pope and Emperor, where was the man to turn? I can call spirits from the vasty deep—but may I call one compassionate heart to aid me in my deep distress . . . ?

There is a sort of courage that is bred, not of hope, but of hope's antithesis: the realisation that all hope, and all the hope of hope, is fled. When that realisation

comes, man may face much that, when hope was yet his, he had shrunk from with terror.

Let this fact explain how, when Cagliostro was forced to choose between the alternatives of offending the Emperor and the Pope, he chose to offend the Pope, for all that he must have known that the 'democratic' Joseph would have confined his punishments to mere deprivation of personal liberty, while His Holiness, safe in the arms of Jesus; safe even from the civilising influences of liberal thinking; would take his revenge on the Apostle of Freemasonry in ways whose very mediævalism would be taken to proclaim the authenticity of the Church's pretensions to long descent. Let this fact explain why the two travellers turned southwards; towards Rome; towards the dear remembered scenes of Seraphina's childhood and the days of their early married life; towards . . . whatever lay ahead. Our common human nature will enable every reader to share with me the suspicion that this decision to go to Rome, bravely taken, may have brought with it a revival of courage; a revival, perhaps, of hope. The two travellers may have thought that so bold an answer to Fate's challenge may not have been undeserving of the tribute that even men pay to courage in the face of death. . . .

## §

Two years after the Count's leaving England's inhospitable shores, the Cagliostros arrived in Rome; in the May of 1789; but a bare eight weeks before the fruition of those schemes in which the Count had had so great a part. In the July of that same year the Bastille was destroyed by the Parisians, and

De Launay, its Governor, sacrificed to popular hatred. What had happened, had Alessandro accepted De Breteuil's offers to return to France? What had happened, had he not so carefully avoided that country in his journey from London to Basle? We may only surmise.

It is improbable that Marie Antoinette, whatever the degree of her vindictiveness, had condemned the Count to a worse punishment than imprisonment for life, and thus he would have had to spend but a few weeks in the dreaded prison before being released by the revolutionaries. And what position he might not have attained in the regard of those who believed—rightly or wrongly, it does not matter—that he had prophesied the very act which had given him his liberty . . . !

But even though we must admit that the Count had been intimately associated with the revolutionary movements of the years immediately preceding the collapse of the French Monarchy, we cannot but feel that the man was unaware of the imminence of the event for which he had worked. He may have thought—may have *known*, even—that the Bastille was destined to be destroyed. What he cannot have known was *when*.

So it was that, with the resignation of despair, he came to Rome. And what feelings must have stirred the heart of the two travellers when they came among the half-forgotten scenes of twenty years since will be understood by all who have similarly revisited the surroundings that long absence has rendered dear.

Thus contemptuously does Carlyle dismiss the reasons for the Count's deciding to revisit Rome: "The wayworn Grand-Coptess has begun to blab

family secrets; she longs to be in Rome, by her mother's hearth, by her mother's grave; in any nook, where so much as the shadow of a refuge awaits her. . . ." But why not? Was there ever a better reason to do anything in this world, than to seek a place in which we shall be free from the persecution of the world . . .? "To the desperate Count Front-of-Brass" (so the historian continues) "all places are nearly alike: urged by female babble, he will go to Rome, then; why not . . .?"

Yes, why not? But all places are not nearly all alike. In Rome he must be more circumspect than ever has before been necessary; even in the domains of the Emperor. In Rome the spies of the Inquisition are prowling to beat quarries for the bloodhounds of the Vatican; along the Corso, in the Pincian Gardens, in the Campo Vaccino, and among the cypresses and ruined tombs of the Appian Way. We may suppose that the parents of Seraphina were dead, for we find no mention of them in the reports of this last period of the Count's life: though it may be that, either from prudence or an unwillingness to involve innocent people in his possible disasters, the Count and Countess did not make their presence in Rome known to the honest *batadore*, in his smithy by the Trinità de' Pellegrini.

For now, the Count had to seek out clients, since the clients might not seek out him. And more, he was forced to extract, as a necessary preliminary to such healing labours as he undertook, a promise from his patients that they would conceal his identity from the authorities. Bearing in mind the natural prejudice of the Inquisition-Biographer, it is interesting to note that this historian cites several instances

of the Count's 'cures', but declines to report favourably on them. According to this hireling of the Vatican, the Count was soon forced to discontinue even this chancy way of earning a living—not from fear of betrayal so much, as from a fear of the natural consequences of his maladroitness: the Inquisition-Biographer states that a lady, who had approached Cagliostro with a request that he should cure her of an ulcer, was made almost gangrenous by the plaster that Cagliostro used. Possibly this is not without its basis of fact. Anti-sepsis was not understood in the Rome of 1789, and even if it had been, the surgeons had to contend with the facts of the undrained Campagna and a Cloaca Maxima unaltered 'since King Tarquin's day. And besides, of what nature was the ulcer? This is a general term, used by ignorant persons to cover anything in the way of a dermatous lesion, from a whitlow to a chancre. A plaster would hardly do the latter much good, whether applied by a magnetiser or by an ordinary G.P. . . .

In the meanwhile, events in France had moved with dramatic rapidity, and it is a source of considerable surprise to those who contemplate the conduct of the Count at this time, to see how he chose to remain in Rome, instead of going at once to Paris, on the outbreak of revolution. The Rome correspondent of the *Moniteur* reported that the Count had received bank-drafts from both London and Paris, though whether from revolutionary circles or not we do not know. But these cannot have been for any great sums, since it would appear that at the time of his arrest by the Holy Office, on September 27th, 1789, the Count had for some time been reduced to the regrettable necessity of borrowing small loans or

angling for invitations to a meal. When one realises that from the time of his arrival in Rome until the officers of the Inquisition took him into the Castle of St. Angelo, no more than five months elapsed, it will be understood that the sums remitted must have been small indeed; for living in Rome, in those days, was cheaper even than it is to-day, and the very secrecy with which the Count was forced to conduct his business prevented his attempting to live in anything but a modest style.

### §

We must assume that Cagliostro, in common with the majority of the French revolutionaries themselves, believed that the limit of the change in the French social system would be set by the King's deciding to accept the position of a constitutional monarch, after the English pattern. It seems curious that one who had been so closely associated with Illuminism should have believed this; but only by assuming this fact may we explain Cagliostro's remaining in Rome, exposed to such danger as he must have known existed for him; to write his urgent appeals to Paris, rather than go to see his correspondents in person, and make sure that his solicitations earned their proper responses. And yet he *must* have known that, even though the King's power had been but limited and not entirely abolished, the old autocratic rule had vanished for ever (at least, *the Monarchy's* autocratic rule!) and that De Breteuil—had that man escaped the vengeance of the revolutionaries—might hardly wrong him now.

Whereas, in Rome, things were as they had always been; only that traditions were a little more set;



prejudices a little more confirmed; decay, both moral and physical, a little more advanced.

Why then did he stay . . . ? There is no satisfactory answer to that question. Asked it, the historian may only shake his head, sighing, and confess a puzzlement as great as his interlocutor's.

But stay he did, and on September 27th, 1789, the Count paid the penalty of his . . . what, folly? To his humble lodgings in a small alley off the Piazza Farnese; in the shadow of the splendid Farnese Palace, but sharing none of its glories; came the agents of the Papal power, to take the Count only a little way down the river; past the bend where the Tiber curves opposite the Porta San Spirito, and so across the ancient Bridge of St. Angelo, and through the doors of the vast building that Hadrian intended for his tomb, but which has served the same purpose for how many thousand others since the Emperor, dreaming of Bithynian Antinous, fell into his last sleep . . . !

### §

It is said that Cagliostro was betrayed to the Holy Office by "the temerity with which he practised Freemasonry in the capital of the Catholic world", but he was betrayed, rather, through the indiscretions of a man driven thereto by the unremitting, inescapable urge of bodily want. There was Seraphina, too; no longer the beauty of Alsatian and Parisian drawing-rooms, whose jewels had been the wonder and envy of all beholders, but a woman prematurely aged by the vicissitudes that she had endured, and one of whom (for all that she was no more than thirty-five) it might well be credited that her son was a twenty eight-year-old captain in the Dutch service. . . .

Temerity . . . ? The concept of temerity is meaningless unless one admits the concept of prudence. And what man, faced, as was the hounded Cagliostro, with the sight of his wife's distress; (the harder to endure, seeing that she bore it with uncomplaining meekness); what man, tormented, as was he, with the memory of his triumphs, and the undeniable evidences, daily growing more patent, of his own mistakes and failure; what man, say I, has need, in such circumstances, of prudence ? And will not such a man dare much . . . seeing, alas ! that there is now so little to lose . . . ?

In the heart of the Eternal City there existed a lodge of Masons; small, it is true, and not to be compared with such an establishment as had once existed (dear God, how long ago it seemed !) in the Rue Claude or in the great Palace of Saverne. But exist it did, for all its small membership and unpretentious circumstances, and it called itself the Lodge of the True Friends. There was need of true friendship when one set up a lodge in the City of the Greatest Bridge-builder, against the very throne of Christ's Vicar on Earth. . . .

To the True Friends, the Count, driven by his desperate need of the common necessities of existence, made his identity known, and the True Friends, it would seem, welcomed him into their company. But the Count would not take so decisive and committing a step as membership of the Lodge implied; instead, he asked the Brothers for some small gift of money in order to alleviate his present distress, and this the Masons, not belying their chosen name, gave to the wretched man.

But his presence in Rome now being known to the Brotherhood, the Count found it difficult to pursue

an independent existence. Forced even more frequently to approach the True Friends for assistance, he might not refuse their invitations to supper. Thus he was one night dining with some of his Masonic friends when he was induced (drink, taken on a depleted stomach, may have much to do with this) to speak on the principles of Egyptian Masonry; and although it would not appear that his disquisition held its old charm for the audience, this revival of former custom must have put it into his head to go the whole hog, and start once more to recruit members for an Egyptian Lodge. We must not forget that the Lodge of the True Friends had received its charter of incorporation from the Grand Orient itself, and was in touch with the Mother Lodge in Paris. It is likely, therefore, that the news of the outbreak of revolution in France had inspired the members of the True Friends to a boldness of conduct which was reflected in the Count's change of attitude towards his own Masonic activities.

What encouraging letters the Count and the True Friends received from Paris we do not know, but it is reasonable to suppose that the Grand Orient promised its disciples abroad the prospect of a Continent-wide repetition of those scenes just enacted in Paris; and that, with the visible evidence of Revolution's success so large in their eyes, the True Friends believed the Grand Orient's promises.

Those of the True Friends who were in Paris in 1797 had no longer any cause to doubt that revolutionary mysticism had achieved its glorious objects, when they heard the cannon of the Republican Army, and through the walls of Rome came pouring the Polish Legion of General Dombrowski, their shakoes

and bearskins gay with the tricolour of the New Freedom, and their standards proclaiming the cause in which they had come to overthrow ancient tyranny: Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood. How wildly the hearts of the True Friends must have beat when the Papal troops gave place to the soldiers of France!

But the Count; he who had worked for just such triumph; he who had written, like some newer Daniel, the words of warning for a newer Belshazzar; he for whom the victorious insurgents sought amid the gloomy cells in which the victims of Christ's Vicar were left to rot; he saw nothing of the vindication of his efforts. For him was no rescue by his brother revolutionaries; not for him the cheering of the soldiers and the thanks of that Convention which was the living proof of his achievement; no, to him was denied even the knowledge that he had, in spite of his follies, succeeded in his prime object: that, although mankind had not found regeneration through Egyptian Masonry, the bullet and the blade of the guillotine had effected much in the way of cleansing. For, when, emboldened by his own decision to talk on the principles of Egyptian Masonry, he decided to start anew on his proselytising, he found, according to the Inquisition-Biographer, two men apparently eager to be instructed in the mysteries of the Egyptian Rite. According to this same authority, Cagliostro, being persuaded that he had to do with men of means, consented to induct them into the Brotherhood of which he was still the Head, and observed the same mumbo-jumbo ritual which had marked the ceremonies of the other Egyptian Lodges. Alas! when, after having made each man, with one wave of his sword, apprentice, companion, and master, Cagliostro demanded their

subscriptions, the two made an improper noise by way of an answer, and the poor Count realised that he had been mocked, as Brother Mash had mocked him.

Terrified now, lest the consequences of his own indiscretion and the others' malice should be a visit from the officers of the Vatican, the Count, losing his head altogether, confessed to a priest, asking to be shriven of his sin in having preached the forbidden doctrines of Freemasonry. One may hope that the priest gave him absolution; but Mr. Trowbridge is most likely correct when he suggests that the 'jokers' were spies of the Holy Office, who had been instructed to trap the Count into an admission of his illegal activities.

The *Moniteur* reported that on his arrest he "evoked as much interest in Rome as he had formerly done in Paris", and I cannot believe that the presence of such a famous figure, conceal it how he might, could have long remained unsuspected in Rome. No, the Holy Office knew well that the Count di Cagliostro was living in the Piazza Farnese; but what is a day more or less; a week; a month; to Her who has eternity to play with? And walled Rome, however easy it might be to enter, was no easy place to get out of, did the authorities decide to place a watch upon the gates.

### §

On the day that the police took away the Count and his lady to the prison of St. Angelo, they pounced on the True Friends. But the True Friends were gone, and of all Rome's Masons, only Alessandro and Seraphina were safely locked away in the Castle: the Count in the very cell in which another self-styled 'Excellency', the Chevalier Joseph Francis

Borri, had been confined. But alas! there was no Queen Cristina to lighten the hours of imprisonment; to arrange with the Pope for the provision of an alchemical laboratory; or to secure from His Holiness permission for the prisoner to visit his royal patroness at her palace without the Vatican walls.

That other and former searcher for the philosopher's stone was more fortunate than his namesake who took up an enforced lodging in the cell that Borri had vacated just one hundred years before; but Pope Pius VI, it would appear, was less impressed by the claims of alchemy than had been his predecessor, who had made the last years of Borri's life so tolerable. Times change, and even in the Vatican men change with them . . . but not too noticeably.

That there may have been more than coincidence in the putting Cagliostro in the same cell as that occupied by Borri is understandable when we consider, firstly, how great an importance is attached by the executive of the Roman Church to the symbolism of futile repetitions, to which we have given the name 'tradition', and, secondly, that Borri's life was strangely homologous with that of our Count, even to his daring to preach a new religious doctrine in Rome itself, and his subsequent condemnation by the Papacy to a death-sentence. Borri, by making a public recantation of his 'heresies', obtained the commutation of this sentence to one of life-imprisonment, and here again we may see a parallel between the history of the Chevalier and that of the Count.

The wildest rumours began to circulate through every stratum of Roman society when the news of Cagliostro's arrest became known; rumours in whose fabrication and dissemination the agents of the Holy

Office would seem to have been not unconcerned. It was said that, from his prison-cell, the Count had issued a manifesto calling upon his followers in Rome to rescue him, even though it should be found necessary, in the achieving this object, to burn down the Castle of St. Angelo, or any other place in which the Grand Cophta might be.

Tyranny is the least imaginative power in the world; possibly because no truly imaginative person could be a tyrant. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* never applied more happily than to the methods that Tyranny pursues. For consider the conduct of the Holy Office in this matter of the imprisoned Count, and ask yourselves how such conduct differs from that to which recent happenings have drawn our horrified attention? Few reading the account of the proceedings of the trial of Alessandro Cagliostro for heresy will not find themselves involuntarily noticing a resemblance to the discipline of those courts of 'justice' convened by such bodies as the Okhrana, the Ovra, the Cheka, the Gestapo, or, indeed, any other association of Tyranny's jackals.

Cagliostro had been arrested because he had sought to undermine God's kingdom on Earth; had attempted to shake that unshakable rock on which Our Almighty Father had raised His Church; against which, as anybody with the slightest acquaintance with Divine Writ knows, the gates of Hell shall not prevail. The unbeliever might ask, therefore, why such a pothor is made about those misguided people who, not having read (or understood, perhaps?) God's promise to His Church, think that they may succeed where Hell is an odds-on loser?

One must not lose sight of the fact here that, just

as the Lodge of the True Friends had been in a close correspondence with Paris, so is it possible; nay, likely; that the Pope was in equally close touch with the Reaction in that city. The Revolution in France was following the course of the Revolution which was to come in Russia one hundred and thirty years later: Autocracy had submitted tamely to the demands of the Moderates, and an illusory equilibrium had been achieved between that which had been displaced and that which had displaced it . . . while a new Autocracy was preparing to seize the power that the Moderates could not hold. And the Concordat between the Vatican and the French State had survived the rude shocks of July, just as it had survived the rude shocks administered to that uneasy partnership of God-and-the-French-King administered by such people as Philip the Fair and Duke Philip II of Orleans, and was destined, under God's providence, to survive other shocks until the partnership was dissolved once and for all in 1904. And the Pope could not be expected to bear any great love for one whose doctrines had threatened the continuance of that association: the perfect example of the symbiotic union: the Peter's Pence of the French faithful in exchange for the Vatican's allowing the French rulers to nominate their own clergy.

*Tit for tat; butter for fat;  
You stole my dog—I'll steal your cat!*

Not any occult gift of fore-knowledge, but a perfect understanding of the mechanics of tyranny permitted the Holy Office so closely to imitate the methods that Herr Himmler has made notorious in his position as head of his gang of hired ruffians. Cagliostro was



kept in prison while the agents of the Holy Office collected their 'evidence'. They were in no hurry to finish this agreeable task, nor was there any question of the Count's being permitted to obtain bail. (What use have the authorities of an ecclesiastical government for such follies as Habeas Corpus Acts or such illusions as the Rights of Man?) And while his *dossier* was being prepared, the Count was denied, not only all intercourse with the outer world, but also the companionship of his wife, whom he asked in vain to be allowed to see. In the Bastille—six months of which he had once declared to be a sufficient expiation for any crime—he had been granted the boon of fresh linen, but such kindness to an about-to-be-condemned heretic was unthinkable. The Count was left to stink and repent.

And in order that the inevitable verdict should not scandalise the more liberal elements of Christian society, the Holy Office anticipated Herr Himmler's methods in blackening the character of the accused. The Rome Correspondent of the *Moniteur* was gratuitously informed that the Papal authorities had intercepted a letter written by the Count to a priest, which had contained details of a plan to overthrow the temporal power of the Papacy. Corroboration of this 'discovery' was supplied by the use of all Autocracy's old and well-tried manoeuvres. There were arrests wholesale; the Vatican guards were reinforced; the Arsenal was closed to the public; and it was rumoured that, as a precaution against a rising, the Government were contemplating the expulsion of all French subjects from the Roman States. In other words, all that creating of an 'atmosphere' with which more recent 'trials' have made us familiar. It never

occurred to the bewildered public, until the scare had passed, to ask why so formidable an opposition had been allowed to develop in the very City of God, any more than the 'unanimously elected' Hitler and others trouble to explain why it is necessary to shoot hundreds and imprison thousands in order to maintain their respective rules.

That Cagliostro had omitted to destroy his private papers on suspecting that he had been betrayed would seem to be fairly well established, and the possession by the agents of the Holy Office of these incriminating documents made the business of a formal trial a ludicrous superfluity. All Rome knew that the unhappy man had been arrested only to be condemned, and that the two advocates appointed by the Inquisition understood their duties too well to make more than the most half-hearted plea on behalf of their client's innocence. Not that more could have availed the Count much, for the Apostolic Court did not extend to the officials appointed to try the case any power to acquit; the most that Cagliostro could hope for was a recommendation to mercy. Mercy . . . ! He was being tried for an offence against Almighty God; but how lucky he had been to have Almighty God as his judge. Unfortunately, he was to be judged by his fellow-men. . . .

## §

Four months after his arrest the Count was brought into court for the opening of the dreary farce of the 'trial'. One may imagine the state of mind engendered by four months of solitary confinement; months in which regret, hope, fear and despair had fought within his distracted mind, until it seemed that sanity

could no longer hold out against the turmoil of conflicting emotions. Surely the National Assembly would make some effort to secure his release, if only because he had been persecuted by the Queen . . .? Why had he been so forgetful as to neglect to destroy those incriminating documents found by the officers of the Inquisition . . .? What was happening to Seraphina; had they extracted a 'confession' from her . . .? If only she and Cagliostro had decided on a common story . . .! But perhaps the Pope would listen to him sympathetically; after all, Egyptian Masonry *did* preach the moral regeneration of mankind . . . the worship of the true God . . .?

Strange thoughts come to trouble the mind of man in such circumstances, as the desperate imagination considers one expedient only to cast it forth in favour of a next which seems to offer a little more hope.

But when they brought him out of his cell in order to face his judges, he must have known that nothing but God's personal intervention in the affairs of His Vicar might effect a respite from persecution.

They confronted him with a tale of his wife's 'confession', and for a moment he was deceived into thinking himself betrayed. Then, recollecting what he knew of the character of his accusers, he relented of his wild reproaches, and, with tears in his eyes, begged her forgiveness for the momentary lack of faith. It was to the Court of France, he declared, that he owed all his misfortunes; that corrupt Court which had pursued him with its vindictiveness ever since the Parliament of Paris had acquitted him of all complicity in a criminal manoeuvre. Was *that* to be his reward for having his innocence proclaimed by the highest tribunal in France?

Why did he talk on . . .? What is this monstrous burden that life imposes on us: *the duty of living*; so that we must barter all that we have; even our pride; even our reason; for the hopeless chance of continuing *alive*?

For did he not know; by hearsay; and, since his arrest, by personal acquaintance; the character of his judges?

Who did not, whether they had lived in Rome or not stirred beyond the limits of their native village? Who, who indeed, had not heard of the Holy Inquisition; the Guardians of the Majesty of the King of Mercy; the bloody-fanged Hounds of God . . .?

"I saw the lips of the black-robed judges. They appeared to me white—whiter than the sheet upon which I trace these words—and thin even to grotesqueness; thin with the intensity of their expression of firmness—of immovable resolution—of stern contempt of human torture."

Yes, of human torture! Let Carlyle laugh at the Divine Cagliostro, bamboozled into making his confession to the priest in the hope of some remission of punishment; let him find some humorous element in the spectacle of the Arch-trickster tricked himself into a hypocritical acceptance of the Church's doctrines (after having read the 'improving' book that his jailers gave him) and a declaration that the principles of Freemasonry—Egyptian\* and otherwise—were contrary to the teachings of the Roman Church.

Who can blame him? Upon the wall of the court in which they tried him, a rack was stood; a reminder (had he needed one) that confessions not made voluntarily could be extracted by methods well understood of his captors.

Who shall blame him, I say? And who shall wonder that he came to contradict himself; that at one moment he was saying:

"I mean and I wish to mean, that even as those who honour their father and mother, and respect the Sovereign Pontiff, are blessed of God; even so, all that I did, I did it by the order of God, with the power that He vouchsafed to me, and to the advantage of God and of Holy Church; and I mean to give you the proofs of all that I have done and said . . . by shewing that as I have served God for God and by the power of God, He has given me at last the counter-poison to confound and combat Hell . . . and if the Holy Father could get into his hands tonight these answers of mine, I predict to all brethren, believers and unbelievers, that I should be at liberty tomorrow morning."

Or that, at another moment, he should—promised his liberty if only he would 'tell the truth'—assert that there are four million Freemasons in Europe, only waiting the word to go forth and exterminate every priest and king met with.

Will the Inquisition let him go? It will not. "No one," says the Inquisition-Biographer, in the single passage whose sincerity we may not doubt, "believed him; and if he flattered himself on recovering his liberty by this means, he was mistaken."

"In fine, after eighteen months of the weariest hounding, doubling, worrying and standing at bay," Cagliostro prepares to hear his sentence. The black-robed officers of the Inquisition file into the great chamber and take their seats on the high bench. Against the wall the rack still symbolically rests, and above them all still writhes that Christ for Whose sufferings all mankind has had to pay, save those who have been careful enough to superintend the payment. Thou hast conquered, O Pale Galilean; and Thy Gestapo hath exacted the tribute from the defeated!



[Reichsstaatskanzlei]

POPE PIUS VI



## XXV

AND now the chase is over; the quarry is exhausted from the efforts that he has made to elude his savage, relentless pursuers; and the huntsmen have grown weary of following their prey through the mazy turnings of his despairing flight. He is exhausted now; exhausted beyond effort, beyond hope. There is no fight left in him. But it was good fun while it lasted, was it not, Brother Huntsman? Good fun . . . ! But now let us kill, and get home to our supper!

*Vae victis !*

On March 21st, 1791, eighteen months after the arrest of the accused, his case was taken to the General Assembly of the Holy Office, and after consideration by that body, was laid before the Pope, Pius VI. On April 7th, of the same year, His Holiness pronounced judgment, in which solemn exercise of prerogative he might count on the guidance of the Holy Ghost. The accused was found Guilty of Heresy, and condemned to suffer the penalty prescribed for heretics in two Papal Bulls: the penalty of death.

But, as though reminded of something so long forgotten that it had become (so it seemed) almost alien to their ways of thought, the Guardians of God's Word appear to recollect that the God in Whose name the unhappy wretch has been condemned to follow the path that so many other misguided ones had been put upon, was a God of Mercy, and not altogether—as He Himself had pointed out—a God



of Vengeance. Thus was the Count di Cagliostro saved from death—or, rather, from an *immediate* and *quick* execution—by the clemency of one whose name means ‘Loving’, but whether in allusion to the love of man or the love of God, we do not know.

“GIUSEPPE BALSAMO! Attainted and convicted of many crimes, and of having incurred the censures and penalties pronounced against heretics, dogmatics” (i.e.: the wrong sort of dogmatics) “heresiarchs, and propagators of magic and superstition, has been found GUILTY, and condemned to the said censures and penalties as decreed by the Apostolic Laws of Clement XII and Benedict XIV, against all persons who, in any manner whatever, favour or form societies and conventicles of Freemasonry, as well as by the edict of the Council of State against all persons convicted of this crime in Rome or in any other place within the dominions of the Pope.

“Notwithstanding, by special grace and favour, the sentence of death by which this crime is expiated is hereby commuted into perpetual imprisonment in a fortress, where the culprit is to be strictly guarded without any hope of pardon whatever.

“Furthermore, after he shall have abjured his offences as an heretic in the place of his imprisonment, he shall receive absolution, and certain salutary penalties will then be prescribed for him, to which he is hereby ordered to submit.”

Thus euphemistically was the Count saved from the hangman and handed over to the torturers. Not for nothing had the rack been so prominently displayed to the gaze of the criminal. . . .

Egyptian Masonry was condemned by the same Papal pronouncement, and all those papers relating to it which had been found in the Count's possession were ordered to be destroyed by the common executioner. And against all who should, in future, have association with Masonic societies (in particular, those of the Egyptian and the Illuminist sects) would be

decreed the 'most grievous corporal punishments reserved for heretics.

Thus satisfactorily did the Vatican dispose of an enemy; thus traditionally did it administer the *coup-de-grace* to a beaten foe; secure in its fatuous complacency, it did not hear, in the distance, the cries of those who were hunting the hunter; who were to exact payment from that which had grown gross and corrupt on payment; who were to revenge the wrongs of men on Her who had closed her ears to the urgings of pity that she might discharge her self-granted duty of avenging the wrongs of God.

## §

But although the new-born people of France thrust back the invader from their borders, and, carried onwards by the natural force of their effort, pushed victorious far beyond the limits of their country, they did not come to rescue Cagliostro. There is a story that is told of those last days of his imprisonment in St. Angelo, before the guards marched into his cell to cart him off to the mountain-fortress of San Leo; a story which must make one shudder, so poignant is it.

It is said that when all Rome shook under the tempestuous blasts of a hurricane, and the lightning-flashes and thunder-claps followed each other in such quick succession that it seemed as though the firmament had riven in the Ultimate Chaos—such a storm as Rome had not known in living memory—the unhappy prisoner, still, in spite of his sufferings, nurturing some pathetic shred of hope, felt his heart quicken into renewed life. What his gaolers, crossing themselves in their superstitious fear, knew to be the

thunder of God's artillery, seemed to the crazed man to be the bursting shells of less spiritual friends. The French Army of the Revolution was at hand! The Sons of Liberty, for whose happiness he had worked so long, and so terribly had suffered, were storming the walls of the Eternal City—eternal no longer! The walls of Romulus, of Servius Tullius, of Aurelius, of Probus, of Honorius, of Theodoric, of Belisarius and Narses, and of Heaven knew how many between Narses and Urban VIII: the walls of Rome were crumbling before the French artillery, and the Generals of the Republic were following in the footsteps of Odoacer and Henry IV. Soon the Tricolour would displace the Yellow-and-White, and the songs of liberty would resound even under the coffered ceilings of St. Peter's . . .

The divine music of the cannon! The half-mad prisoner, weeping for joy, beats with bloody fists on the door of his cell.

"A moi, camarades! Me voici! A moi; à moi . . .!"

But the lightning-flashes grown dimmer and the roll of the thunder fainter. It was not the French . . . it was only God. . . .

### §

When they came at last, seven years afterwards, they asked to be shown his body. He had been dead for some time, said the cowering gaolers to the soldiers who now looked upon the shrunk cadaver. The Polish Legion, under General Dombrowski, had stormed the fortress of San Leo, and the remnants of the Papal Army had surrendered to the victorious French troops:

A republic was proclaimed in Rome, but succour had come too late to save the Count and Seraphina. She had died in the convent of St. Appollonia four years before General Dombrowski sought the grave of her husband, and when *he* died, no one really knows.

He had always been regarded as a peculiarly dangerous enemy by the Vatican, even when he was safely imprisoned in the rock-hewn cell of the Castle; and when the news of his sentence reached the outside world, the enemies of Rome burst forth into such a storm of abuse, that the Vatican was forced to excuse its harshness by making the most preposterous charges against the man who might no longer answer them.

Possibly the Vatican shared the Count's belief in the existence of friends who might be counted upon to help him; possibly retained this belief long after the unhappy prisoner of San Leo had abandoned all hope. At any rate, the gaolers took no chances with the Count. For four years at least—and how much longer we cannot say with certainty—he remained in a cellar, without windows or sanitary conveniences of any kind; a cellar to which access was to be had only through a trapdoor in the roof. There, without fresh air, exercise, or the company of his fellows, the Count was left to meditate on the fate of those who seek the liberation of the human spirit from the fetters of tyranny.

In the last year of his imprisonment, some small element of pity would seem to have become manifest in the heart of the prison-governor, for the Count was brought up from his dungeon into a cell situate upon the ground-level, where there was light and air.

Air enough to breathe by, and just enough light to scrawl the inconsequential scribblings of one who had seen, in all its horror, the full vileness of the human heart.

The latest inscription bears the date of March 6th, 1795. The Army of the Republic arrived two years after that date, but how long before their arrival Cagliostro had died, they did not discover. It was rumoured that he had hanged himself in a perfectly understandable despair, while another rumour had it that the authorities, fearing that the Masons of Italy were contemplating his rescue, had restored the original sentence, and had had the Count killed.

We do not know. It is fitting that his end was consistent with his beginnings and all of his life; that, as mysteriously as he appeared among men, he should leave them . . .

*Requiescat in pace!*

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